

**FRAME AND FINITUDE:  
THE APORETIC AESTHETICS OF  
ALAIN RESNAIS'S CINEMATIC MODERNISM**

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This dissertation argues that the modernist cinema of Alain Resnais and the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger share a sustained commitment to aporias, which not only serve as conceptual sites for investigation but also function as structural forms that shape their respective projects. In the case of Resnais, I show that specific films address a number of postwar anxieties through the reflexive staging of the following intrinsically irresolvable tensions: between film's technologically disclosive capacity and its limits, between art and instrumentalization, between the unrepresentability of historical trauma and the material articulations of memory, and between the political discourse of agency and cinema's foreclosure of spectatorial intervention. In the case of Heidegger, from the earlier existential analytic to his later lectures and essays on the historicity of being, his entire project can be understood as deliberately attending to the diverse forms of the interplay between revealing and concealing that constitutes, for him, the essentially aporetic structure of truth. Furthermore, I argue that the different configurations of epistemic and existential finitude underwrite an approach shared by both filmmaker and philosopher that preserves the irresolvability of these aporias and manifests their generative possibilities. It is by drawing on the crucial role ascribed to finitude in the aporetic structures of Heidegger's thought and Resnais's cinema that I map out one form of this generative possibility as an ethics and aesthetics of acknowledgement.

Chapter One interweaves Resnais's *Van Gogh* with Heidegger's insights into the aporetic mode of disclosure that characterizes artworks in order to elucidate Resnais's distinctive cinematic constructions of worldhood. Chapter Two places Resnais's *Night and Fog* in dialogue with Heidegger's account of modern technology to situate the film's reflexive interrogation of the aporia between representation and instrumentalization within a broader postwar philosophical discourse surrounding the question concerning the possibility of art as a site of resistance. Chapters Three and Four take up anxiety and releasement as affective manifestations of finitude in Heidegger's thought in order to read the aporetic configurations of *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* as organized around the radical disavowals demanded by an ethics of acknowledgement.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Heidegger and Cinema

Despite the recent uptick in the theoretical literature on film that makes substantial reference to the writings of Martin Heidegger, often cited as one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, his work has never quite taken hold in any sustained or pervasive way in much of the history of film studies. Contextualizing the conditions of this lacuna within the discipline's broader reception history of phenomenology more generally only takes us so far in better understanding why. While Dudley Andrew's 1978 article "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory" offers historical insight into how the field's academic disciplinarization in the mid-1960s coincided with the rising predominance in French intellectual culture of semiotics and structuralism in a way that ultimately eclipsed the significant appeals to phenomenology that were made in French postwar film criticism, phenomenological film theory has since become a burgeoning area of scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Most groundbreaking is Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* (1992), which not only adopts Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential-phenomenological investigations of embodied perception to account for cinematic spectatorship but also mobilizes the dialectical polemic against idealism and empiricism that structures the arguments of his magnum opus *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) in order to stage a novel critique of the reductive conceptual strategies prevalently employed in the Marxist-psychoanalytic film theories of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Whether

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<sup>1</sup> Dudley Andrew, "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," *Movies and Methods: An Anthology, Volume II*, edited by Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 625-632.

<sup>2</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

referenced as a source for elaboration and extended application or targeted as a subject for critique, Sobchack's analysis has had an ongoing interdisciplinary impact on contemporary studies in cinematic affect and perception.<sup>3</sup> And while this is in large part responsible for why Merleau-Ponty's iteration of phenomenology has been privileged, the still expanding area of phenomenological film theory has produced major studies that place cinema in dialogue with figures such as Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, and Paul Ricoeur.<sup>4</sup> Considering how profoundly and inextricably formative his work has been to twentieth-century French thought – to the extent that his “omnipresence in France,” which Jacques Derrida sums up as “in the end he is everywhere,” has recently been characterized by Dominique Janicaud in his claim that apart “from the mathematical sciences and life and earth sciences, there is hardly any sector of knowledge or intellectual activity that has not been positively or negatively affected” by it – and especially to those philosophers who have become most prominently

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<sup>3</sup> See Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Jane Stadler, *Pulling Focus: Intersubjective Experience, Narrative Film, and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2008); Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity beyond French Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Matilda Mroz, *Temporality and Film Analysis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Hunter Vaughan, *Where Film Meets Philosophy: Godard, Resnais, and Experiments in Cinematic Thinking* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Saige Walton, *Cinema's Baroque Flesh: Film, Phenomenology, and the Art of Entanglement* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); CarrieLynn D. Reinhard and Christopher J. Olson, eds., *Making Sense of Cinema: Empirical Studies into Film Spectators and Spectatorship* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> On Husserl, see Frank P. Tomasulo, “The Text-in-the-Spectator: The Role of Phenomenology in an Eclectic Theoretical Methodology,” *Journal of Film and Video* 40.2 (1988): pp. 20-32; Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On Sartre, see Robert Harvey, “Sartre/Cinema: Spectator/Art That is Not One,” *Cinema Journal* 30.3 (Spring 1991): pp. 43-59; William Pamerleau, *Existentialist Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jean-Pierre Boulé and Enda McCaffrey, eds., *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartrean Perspective* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011). On Levinas, see Sarah Cooper, *Selfless Cinema?: Ethics and French Documentary* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006); Sam B. Girgus, *Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption: Time, Ethics, and the Feminine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). On Ricoeur, see Dudley Andrew, “Tracing Ricoeur,” *Diacritics* 30.2 (2000): pp. 43-69; Malin Wahlberg, *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

embraced in film theory, how do we explain Heidegger's absence from this disciplinary trajectory?<sup>5</sup>

Of the most conspicuous reasons is Heidegger's associations with the Nazi party and movement not only in the well-documented official capacity during his rectorate at the University of Freiburg from 1933 to his resignation in 1934 but also in an unofficial capacity, the latter of which remains far less determinate, has continued to be the subject of scrutiny, and has recently been reinvigorated in light of the unambiguous anti-Semitism evident in the 2014 publication of the first series of personal notes collected as the *Black Notebooks*. While whether and to what extent his philosophy is underwritten by fascist ideology has remained an ongoing area of debate, it is perhaps of no small significance that among the contemporaneous German critical theorists – who have become particularly foundational to contemporary film studies for their novel and, at times, competing configurations of cinema within broader political critiques of culture and aesthetics – it is Theodor Adorno who mounted such an acerbic case specifically against Heidegger's existential analytic as “fascist right down to its innermost components.”<sup>6</sup> Given that any serious study of Heidegger would have to address this specter of Nazism, especially to an audience of film scholars whose academic formation and rise in the 1960s and 1970s coalesced around a constellation of theoretical texts that explicitly aspired toward a mid-

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<sup>5</sup> Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, translated by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 301, 352. In addition to Janicaud's sustained historical and philosophical study of Heidegger's influence in France, other works that trace out his impact on the French development not only of phenomenology and existentialism but also of Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and beyond, include Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); David Pettigrew and François Raffoul, eds., *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften, Volume 19*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 637-638; cited in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, translated by Chris Turner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 105, 117-118.

twentieth-century neo-Marxist framework for radical politics, that there is no Heideggerian film theory seems rather uncontroversial.

Another important reason has something to do not so much with the obvious lack of writing about cinema in Heidegger's body of work but, rather, with the rare instance where he does make mention of it. In Heidegger's fictionalized dialogical recounting of a conversation he shared with a visiting Japanese scholar in the mid-1950s, Kurosawa Akira's internationally successful *Rashomon* is brought up only to be squarely situated within his broader ontological polemic on modern technology. Reminiscent of his accounts of "enframing" (*Ge-stell*) and "the world picture," he writes that "regardless of what the aesthetic quality of a Japanese film may turn out to be, the mere fact that our world is set forth in the frame of a film forces that world into the sphere of...photographic objectification," which is already "a consequence of the ever wider outreach of Europeanization."<sup>7</sup> The conceptual context for this form of objectification will be more fully elaborated later in this dissertation, but here, I want to call attention to how causally the "aesthetic quality" of film is being dismissed. What is being disregarded by way of the "regardless" is the kind of specificity that much of aesthetic analysis and criticism is staked on. Thus, in reducing film to its own reductive framing of the world and by positing this mode of framing as itself manifesting a historically contingent yet paradigmatic condition of possibility, it would appear that the film (any film), much like the hammer (any hammer), merely performs an ontic demonstration of an ontological condition. With respect to the question concerning Heidegger's absence in much of the history of academic film studies, there would appear to be a plausible incommensurability between Heidegger's ontological project and a critical aversion shared by many of the formative film theorists of the 1970s toward ontologies of

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer," *On the Way to Language*, translated by Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), p. 17.

any stripe, most prominently voiced in Peter Wollen's article "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film" (1976).<sup>8</sup> Aside from this conspicuous yet discursively constrained incompatibility, there is a much broader problem that Heidegger's rare invocation of a specific cinematic work poses for the application of his philosophy to film and film theory.

If Heidegger's ontology – whether his earlier existential analytic of Dasein or the later turn toward the historicity of being – is taken to be totalizing in its subsumption of all ontic particulars, which has been a familiar way of understanding his work and has often been the target of critique most notably articulated in different ways by Levinas and Adorno, then it would follow that a Heideggerian film theory might be satisfied with habitually repeating the mantra of constitution or the revelation of being as being, featuring an inconsequential and interchangeable cast of cinematic instantiations. The problem here is twofold. First, this model of interpretation simply relegates cinema to the role of conceptual illustration. Whatever the general shortcomings of this method of forging a link between film and philosophy might be, attempting to employ it through Heideggerian readings of films leads to a second, more pressing dilemma. As is suggested by the cited passage above that hermetically reduces film and the world it frames to photographic objectification, committing to a reading of a film as ontic parable of Heideggerian ontology entails a tacit commitment to the ontic-ontological configuration of cinema within Heidegger's polemic on technology, and yet this is rarely confronted in an explicit and critically sufficient way. Put differently, either making a case that a given film reveals Heideggerian themes or to take up the alternative method of suggesting that a given film is

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film," *Screen* 17.1 (Spring 1976): pp. 7-23. For a comprehensive and insightful reading of how Wollen's essay offers criticisms of various film ontologies, from what he considers to be the idealism of André Bazin to the materialism of Peter Gidal, in order to propose a shift from ontological modernism to a "post-Brechtian" semiotic modernism, see David Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 147-179.

somehow doing philosophy in a cinematic form leaves unaddressed the larger issue that threatens to undermine the methodological coherence of the entire conversation: “the mere fact that our world is set forth in the frame of a film.” That is, film is not just any ontic particular but, rather, one that uniquely manifests the modern mechanical and metaphysical processes of reducing the world according to calculated standards of efficient manipulability.

Over the last fifteen years, there has been surging interest in bringing Heidegger’s work to bear on the interpretation of various films. Central to this trend is the filmmaker Terrence Malick, whose distinctive style – together with the biographical details of his earlier training in academic philosophy that includes his 1969 translation of Heidegger’s *The Essence of Reasons* and a dissertation on the concept of world in Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger – has been pitched by some as a case study in “Heideggerian cinema.” In addition to this initial and ongoing focus on Malick, others have since made significant appeals to Heidegger as a way to work through a wide range of films. Many of these efforts have taken up the method of conceptual application, in which the films are read as illustrating some set of Heideggerian concepts, while others have privileged a film-as-philosophy method, insisting that certain films can cinematically think or do a kind of philosophy that is conversant with, or informed by, some aspect of Heidegger’s thought.<sup>9</sup> My intention here is not to discredit this body of work or to

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<sup>9</sup> For a helpful overview and meta-treatment of the extensive literature on the intersections of Heidegger and Malick that also makes a compelling argument for how this particular intersection exemplifies the discursive and cultural mobility and transformation of philosophical ideas, see Martin Woessner, “What is Heideggerian Cinema? Film, Philosophy, and Cultural Mobility,” *New German Critique* 38.2 (2011): pp. 129-157. For other sources exploring this same intersection, see James Morrison and Thomas Schur, *The Films of Terrence Malick* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003); Kaja Silverman, “All Things Shining,” *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 323-342; Robert Sinnerbrink, “A Heideggerian Cinema?: On Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*,” *Film-Philosophy* 10.3 (2006): pp. 26-37; Marc Furstenuau and Leslie MacAvoy, “Terrence Malick’s Heideggerian Cinema: War and the Question of Being in *The Thin Red Line*,” *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, edited by Hannah Patterson (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), pp. 179-191; Hubert Dreyfus and Camilo Salazar Prince, “*The Thin Red Line*: Dying without Demise, Demise without Dying,” *The Thin Red Line*, edited by David Davies (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 29-43; Steven Rybin, *Terrence Malick and the Thought of Film* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012). For a sampling of how Heidegger has been invoked in the interpretation of films by other filmmakers, see Krzysztof

claim that one method is preferable to the other. To be sure, the current study – along with my discussions of Heidegger elsewhere – has greatly benefited from these writings, many of which serve as excellent examples of what can be gained from closely reading film and philosophy alongside one another.<sup>10</sup> Yet, one important lacuna in this research is the aforementioned methodological problem that results from the ontic-ontological configuration of cinema in Heidegger's account of technology. One of the aims of this dissertation is to develop a conceptual framework that serves to reinforce inquiries into points of contact between Heidegger and cinema by providing an account of his ontology in which the ontic is not entirely epiphenomenal.

The most common way by which scholars have managed the problem that Heidegger's ontology poses for any Heideggerian approach to cinema is to simply circumvent the historicity in his later writings by primarily drawing from his earlier 1927 magnum opus. To be sure, the distinctive formulations of being-in-the-world, being-with, being-towards-death, and mood or attunement (*Stimmung*) in *Being and Time* have garnered a lot of attention and for good reasons, as this work not only speaks to the meditations on worldhood, intersubjectivity, and death in Malick's cinema but also operates as a toolkit for holistic analyses of how the experience of moviegoers are always already grounded in pre-reflective and affective commitments, which constitute a phenomenological structure of care – unified by timeliness (*Zeitlichkeit*) – that

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Ziarek, "Carlos Saura: Cinematic Poiesis," *Cinematic Thinking: Philosophical Approaches to the New Cinema*, edited by James Phillips (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 68-89; Robert Sinnerbrink, "Stimmung: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood," *Screen* 53.2 (2012): pp. 148-163; Farhang Erfani, *Iranian Cinema and Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 39-67; Pheng Cheah, "World as Picture and Ruination: On Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* as World Cinema," *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, edited by Carlos Rojas and Eileen Chow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 190-206; Lee Carruthers, *Doing Time: Temporality, Hermeneutics, and Contemporary Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> John Rhym, "The Paradigmatic Shift in the Critical Reception of Terrence Malick's *Badlands* and the Emergence of a Heideggerian Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 27.4 (2010): pp. 255-266; John Rhym, "Towards a Phenomenology of Cinematic Mood: Boredom and the Affect of Time in Antonioni's *L'eclisse*," *New Literary History* 43.3 (2012): pp. 477-501.

undermines the inner-outer and subject-object binaries of Cartesian epistemology. However, aside from the constraint that this approach places on the actual films themselves that remain confined in the ontic theater of existential constitution, the specter of historical ontology, which finds important articulation much later in the critique of technology, persists in the promised yet undelivered account of Temporality (*Temporalität*) as the condition of possibility for the meaning of being in Division Three of Part One.<sup>11</sup>

There have been few, however, to take on this problem. Brian Price examines the different ways in which film is either explicitly invoked or implied in the later writings in order to situate the notion of enframing – which “marks not only a structure, but the very work of structuring” – within Heidegger’s critique of the “un-thought” that results from traditional systems of knowledge, thereby allowing for the possibility of productive excess or, as he puts it, “the possibility of movement that can overwhelm any framework whatsoever.”<sup>12</sup> Here, an alternative to cinema’s reduction to mechanical calculability is pitched by way of displacing enframing from Heidegger’s thinking through of the historicity of being and, instead, understood as one among many discourses. In his article on Malick, Martin Woessner sums up the problem more explicitly:

Film gives us the world, another world even, but at what cost? In his essay “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger sought to explain the unrelenting grasp that the technological mind-set has on us...”The fundamental event of the modern age,” he

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), p. 40. The current study’s understanding of the relationship between Heidegger’s earlier and later writings is largely informed by Carol White’s treatment of it as a turning in analytical orientation from a focus on timeliness (*Zeitlichkeit*) as the form of time in which the “existential-ontological constitution of Dasein is grounded” to Temporality (*Temporalität*) as the “temporalizing of temporality” in which the meaning of Being in general is grounded. According to this reading, it is precisely an interpretation of Temporality, determinative of the historically contingent possibilities of how beings in general are revealed as beings, that Heidegger’s later writings – including his philosophy of technology – bear out what is promised at the end of Division Two of Part One in *Being and Time* for an account of time manifesting “itself as the horizon of Being.” See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 488; Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger’s Analysis of Finitude*, edited by Mark Ralkowski (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Brian Price, “Heidegger and Cinema,” *European Film Theory*, edited by Temenuga Trifonova (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 108-121, 118-119.



proclaimed, “is the conquest of the world as picture.” We had effectively enframed the world, turning it into “standing reserve.” Is Malick part of this?<sup>13</sup>

Woessner’s response to this question first acknowledges that Malick’s cinema “is undoubtedly an instance of enframing,” but then he claims that it is nonetheless “of a very different sort” in that the world in Malick’s films are not given to us to be manipulated but, rather, to be questioned – ultimately for the sake of pointing “beyond our anthropocentric blinders” in order to see “being-in-the-world as a gift.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, there are two ways in which Woessner is attempting to resolve the dilemma, both of which are bound by an assumed alternative sense of agency. First, he suggests that there can be different kinds of enframing, the preferable among which is one that operates entirely antithetically to enframing. However, as Heidegger makes clear in his 1949 Bremen lectures – the second part of which entitled “Das Ge-stell” was later revised and published in 1954 as “The Question Concerning Technology” – “Enframing names the universal ordering, gathered of itself, of the complete orderability of what presences as a whole,” and in “enframing, the presencing of all that presences becomes standing reserve.”<sup>15</sup> That is, enframing is not a function but, rather, an ontological condition, and it is, thereby, all-encompassing in a way that does not leave room for the “very different sort” of enframing that Woessner assumes might be redemptive. Second, by stating that “we had effectively enframed the world,” Woessner is imbuing humans with a causal agency wherein inculcation entails a form of responsibility that can be leveraged for escape or resistance. And yet, Heidegger insists

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Woessner, “What is Heideggerian Cinema?,” p. 156; Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Woessner, “What is Heideggerian Cinema?,” p. 156.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, translated by Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 31. I’ve modified Mitchell’s translation to use William Lovitt’s more widely used term “enframing” for *Ge-stell*. For Andrew Mitchell’s argument for replacing “enframing” with the term “positionality,” see his translator’s foreword in Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. xi

that “in the age of technological dominance, the human is placed into the essence of technology, into enframing, by his essence,” and, moreover, such enframing is “no mere *human* doing, even if the human belongs to the carrying out of such a requisitioning.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, while addressing the challenges posed by enframing, Price and Woessner each offer a case for cinema that depends on detaching Heidegger’s critique of technology from his overarching historical ontology.

Robert Sinnerbrink stands out in this regard. In the conclusion to his article “A Heideggerian Cinema? On Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*,” he first acknowledges the problem of Heidegger’s “overwhelmingly negative view of film” in its characterization as a “powerful instance of reductive technological” enframing. He then reminds us that the passage in “The Question Concerning Technology,” in which Heidegger invokes Hölderlin’s oft-cited “where the danger is / there grows the saving power,” signals that enframing as the essence of technology “is a thoroughly *ambivalent* process.”<sup>17</sup> That is, enframing is not only the “revealing and ordering of beings as a totality of available resources,” but it also bears the possibility of a “new relation of appropriation between Being, human beings, and beings that might emerge from within the technological world.”<sup>18</sup> Note here Sinnerbrink’s use of the term “Being” for *das Sein*, which Heidegger distinguishes from particular “beings” (*das Seiende*) by defining it as “that which determines beings as beings.”<sup>19</sup> However, in the fourth part of the Bremen lectures entitled “The Turn” (*die Kehre*), Heidegger maintains a strong position regarding enframing

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 35, 29. Mitchell translates *Bestellen* to “requisitioning,” while Lovitt’s more widely used translation uses the term “ordering” for both *Bestellen* and *bestellen*.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 34; Robert Sinnerbrink, “A Heideggerian Cinema?,” p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Sinnerbrink, “A Heideggerian Cinema?,” p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 25. In order to maintain consistency with Sinnerbrink, I’ve modified Macquarrie and Robinson’s use of the term “entity” for *das Seiende* to “beings.”

when he claims that it not only is “the danger within Being” but also “is Being itself.”<sup>20</sup> How then can there emerge new relations of appropriations between “Being, human beings, and beings” within the “technological world” if enframing is an ontological condition of possibility that is determinative all the way down – determinative of how beings are revealed to us as beings?

Although Sinnerbrink makes an insightful and necessary gesture toward the possibility of a mode of revealing that is alternative to enframing, I want to suggest that rather than *ambivalent*, Heidegger’s way of developing the tension between the danger and the saving power is *aporetic*. This is the term that Andrew Feenberg and Dana Belu use in their criticism of Heidegger’s writings on technology for, on the one hand, positing a totalizing account of enframing and, on the other hand, locating in the work of art the redemptive possibility of the “bringing-forth” of *poiēsis* that is both “akin to the essence of technology” and “fundamentally different from it.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the problem centers on the epiphenomenal position that the ontic occupies in relation to Heidegger’s ontology, the result of which Feenberg elsewhere sums up as follows: “Ontic political struggles over the design of devices cannot change the ontological dispensation within which the world appears as technological.”<sup>22</sup> Because Heidegger’s

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 65; Martin Heidegger, “The Turning,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 38. It should be noted that Heidegger’s text actually uses the term *Seyn* here, which is the archaic spelling of *Sein*, in order to signal a post-metaphysical thinking through of *Sein*. However, considering that this text was originally delivered as a talk, that there is no discernible difference in the pronunciation between the two terms, and that *Seyn* rarely appears in the material published during his lifetime – along with the convenience of maintaining consistency with Sinnerbrink’s passage – I’ve maintained Lovitt’s translation of that favors the term “Being” as opposed to Mitchell’s translation of it to “beyng.” For a fuller account of the difference between *Seyn* and *Sein*, see Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, foreword to *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, by Martin Heidegger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. xxii-xxiv.

<sup>21</sup> Dana S. Belu and Andrew Feenberg, “Heidegger’s Aporetic Ontology of Technology,” *Inquiry* 53 (2010): pp. 1-19; Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” pp. 34-35.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Feenberg, “The Ontic and the Ontological in Heidegger’s Philosophy of Technology: Response to Thomson,” *Inquiry* 43(2000): pp. 445-450. For a similar critique of Heidegger’s disavowal of technological particulars, see Don Ihde, *Heidegger’s Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 114-127.

privileging of art and poetry, along with his broader ambitions of overcoming metaphysics, depends on the kind of ontic efficacy that his account of enframing forecloses, Feenberg and Belu conclude that his philosophy of technology is undermined by a fundamental aporia.

This dissertation accepts the premise that the relationship between the ontic and ontological, which underwrites not only Heidegger's views on technology but also his overall philosophical project, is indeed structurally aporetic. However, in contrast to Feenberg and Belu, it will be argued that this aporia is both essential and *generative*, the case for which will be grounded on an examination of its crucial and diverse configurations of finitude – understood as the limitation to epistemic and existential horizons of intelligibility. Thus, one of the binding aims of the following chapters will be to explore the variety of ways in which finitude is manifest as necessary and generative in and for the aporetic structure at work in different aspects of Heidegger's thought. Chapter One examines how the formulation of the strife between world and earth privileges art as a material site for the staging of the unresolvable tension between disclosure and concealment that, for Heidegger, is constitutive for the occurrence of truth (*alêtheia*). Chapter Two draws out the overlooked role of finitude in Heidegger's account of enframing and *poiēsis* in order to directly engage with Feenberg and Belu's specific criticism. Finally, Chapters Three and Four attend to, respectively, the earlier writings on the fundamental mood of anxiety (*Angst*) and the later development of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) as affective manifestations of the aporia.

## II. Resnais's Aporitic Aesthetics

It is perhaps of considerable significance that, early in the postwar French occupation of southwestern territories in Germany – a period during which travel and communication within

and to the Black Forest region were difficult and during which Heidegger's condition and whereabouts were unconfirmed – the first to visit the philosopher in September of 1945 at his Freiburg home were three representatives of the First Army: a Lieutenant Fleurquin (who was tasked with establishing a cultural center that would foster dialogue between German and French writers and artists), Frédéric de Towarnicki (who would eventually play a major role as an interlocutor in the French reception of Heidegger's work), and his close friend Alain Resnais.<sup>23</sup> While the importance of this meeting, along with the photograph that Resnais took of it, has been well documented, it is not clear to what extent Resnais's filmmaking has been influenced by the philosopher. To be sure, this study is not so much concerned with making a case for Resnais's cinema as being Heideggerian, especially when couched in the biographical tropes that are often employed in the prominent readings of Malick's films. Rather, the primary aim that motivates the dissertation's interpretive and methodological strategies is in demonstrating that both filmmaker and philosopher share a commitment to a set of problems that they articulate in distinct yet mutually enriching ways.

In tandem with deepening an explication of the aporetic structure of Heidegger's thought, I show that Resnais's films are also profoundly marked by a compositional and thematic investment in specific aesthetic, ethical, and conceptual aporias. Furthermore, Resnais's interrogation of such aporias, I argue, are generative not only for their historical contribution to the aesthetics of postwar modernist cinema but also, and more importantly, for their development

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<sup>23</sup> Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, pp. 49-50; Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France*, pp. 161-168; Frédéric de Towarnicki, *À la rencontre de Heidegger: Souvenirs d'un messenger de la Forêt-Noire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). Towarnicki would later be called upon by Argos Films to convince Resnais of reconsidering his initial decline to undertake a documentary project about the concentration camps, and he would also collaborate with Resnais on an unproduced screen adaptation of the Jean Ray serial *Les Aventures de Harry Dickson*. See Sylvie Lindeperg, *Night and Fog: A Film in History*, translated by Tom Mes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 38; James Monaco, *Alain Resnais* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 145; Frédéric de Towarnicki, *Les Aventures de Harry Dickson: Scénario de Frédéric de Towarnicki pour un film (non réalisé) par Alain Resnais* (Nantes: Capricci, 2007).

toward a unique mode of cinematic empathy. More specifically, I examine how Resnais's films address a number of postwar anxieties through the reflexive staging of the following intrinsically irresolvable tensions: between film's technologically disclosive capacity and its limits, between art and instrumentalization, between the unrepresentability of historical trauma and the material articulations of memory, and between the political discourse of agency and cinema's inherent disavowal of spectatorial intervention. By mapping out how these aporetic formations interface with Heidegger's thinking through and with the aporetic structure of truth, this work attends to the generative configurations of existential finitude in a number of Resnais's postwar films to show how finitude operates both as a limit situation to reason, identification, and agency and also as a grounds for working toward an ethical aesthetics of acknowledgement.

But first a word on modernism. Claims by Eric Rohmer that Resnais is "the first modern filmmaker of the sound film" and by Serge Daney that his films operate as "unimpeachable witnesses of our modernity" gesture toward the decisive impact Resnais's postwar films have had on the history of modernist cinema.<sup>24</sup> But what precisely is modernist cinema? This dissertation follows András Bálint Kovács's study of European art cinema from 1950 to 1980 wherein the modernist cinema of the postwar period is demarcated by way of its historical specificity and a common set of aesthetic practices and institutional formations. Bearing in mind not only that cinema's material emergence and modes of reception in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century point to its intrinsic inseparability from the discourses of *fin de siècle* modernity but also that one can map out an early modernist moment in the 1920s and 1930s represented by diverse movements

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Domarchi, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer, "Hiroshima, notre amour," *Cahiers du Cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, translated by Liz Heron, edited by Jim Hiller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 61; Serge Daney, *Ciné journal 1981-1985* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), p. 164, cited in Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 31.

of cinematic experimentation ranging from Soviet montage and German expressionism to Surrealism and Dadaism, what ultimately distinguishes late modernist cinema, according to Kovács, are two significant and interrelated features. First, the heterogeneous manifestations of formal patterns (i.e., perspectival fragmentation, compositional abstraction, aesthetic contingency, and reflexivity) mobilized a shared critical reaction to the normative standards of classical Hollywood narration without an altogether disavowal of narrative. Second, the international rise after the Second World War of a specific institutional grid – “backed by tax laws, professional associations, production and distribution networks, film festivals, and prestigious magazines” – established art cinema as a commercially viable and discursively robust alternative ecosystem.<sup>25</sup> What makes Resnais’s work exemplary of this kind of late modernist cinema is not only that his postwar films reflexively interrogate expressions of subjectivity and memory through challenging experimentations with narrative time but also that the international reception of his work has played such a significant role in its configurations within and reverberations throughout art cinema’s institutional networks. Echoing Rohmer’s statement on Resnais, Kovács claims that it was during the watershed year of 1959 at the Cannes Film Festival, already notable for featuring a number of films that were formative to the historical development to this institution, that *Hiroshima mon amour* “had the unquestionable primacy of most consistently introducing modernism into art cinema.”<sup>26</sup>

In examining Resnais’s postwar cinema from within this modernist context, this dissertation makes the case that a distinctive feature throughout his films is a sustained engagement with irresolvable tensions that arise from the manifold intersections between

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<sup>25</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 16-27, 120-139.

<sup>26</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, p. 292.

representation and experience. The analyses of his films that I offer in what follows demonstrate that each film folds a given aporia into its very narrative and formal composition and that closely reading his films alongside Heidegger's philosophical project elucidates how it is precisely by way of these aporetic structures that Resnais's cinema works toward a unique aesthetics of acknowledgement.

Chapter One is devoted to Resnais's first commercially distributed non-fiction short *Van Gogh* (1948) and argues that the film deviates from the conventions of the popular *film sur l'art* genre in ways that formally resist the prevailing interpretation of Resnais's cinematic modernism as representing, or lending access to, the mental contents that presumably make up something like subjective interiority. Establishing important features that will become common in his subsequent works, the film rejects the kind of cinematic empathy that is couched in the classical norms of narrative identification and, instead, formulates a non-isomorphic mode of empathy that emerges from a distinctive configuration of the relationship between frame and world. Furthermore, I show that placing the film in conversation with Heidegger's own well-known and highly controversial treatment of one of Van Gogh's paintings in his "The Origin of the Work of Art" sheds light on what is at stake not only in Resnais's resistance to the representability of subjective interiority and to the classical narrative standards of character or authorial identification but also in the film's aesthetic formulation of an alternative mode of empathy, which stems from a distinctive expression of subjectivity that is inextricable from the construction of worldhood. That is, while the film's cinematography and editing are structured around patterns of disparity – e.g., employing black-and-white film that clearly contrasts with the bright colors of the paintings, close-ups that isolate and detach specific details from the holistic context of each work, tracking shots that engender a sense of movement to an otherwise



inanimate medium, associational graphic matches that open images up beyond their frames, and non-chronological ordering – that undermine any claims to accessing psychological interiority, a world nonetheless is opened up through the persistent preservation of a tension between presence and absence (between disclosure and foreclosure) that finds a form of mobilization in the diverse juxtapositions between the frame of the film, the frames of Van Gogh’s paintings, and the many frames of, for instance, doorways and windows that are represented in the paintings. It is here that Heidegger’s argument that the working of the work of art is located in the essential strife between the referential nexus of intelligibility or possibility (world) and its finitude (earth) will be helpful in thinking through how what he refers to as the *alêtheiac* structure of truth is at work in the ways that the film attends to, and is organized around, various forms of “the nothing.” Additionally, in delineating how this aporetic aesthetics of world-disclosure is bound up with expressions of subjectivity that are not reducible to psychological identification, I read the film’s articulation of Van Gogh’s depression in terms of an existential breakdown that is folded into the film’s aesthetic composition in order to demonstrate a radical form of empathy that calls attention to its own limitations, its own finitude. Thus, for Resnais’s *Van Gogh*, the tension between disclosure and finitude doesn’t function only as an aesthetic mode of opening up a world; rather, the film’s reflexive configuration of this tension into its formal structure is the very basis for an ethics that will be further developed in his subsequent films.

Chapter Two will situate this radical empathy in what Patchen Markell, inspired by Stanley Cavell, refers to as a “politics of acknowledgement,” an approach to issues of justice that stands in contrast to the reductive politics of identification and recognition and is, instead, staked on a heterogeneous account of agency that necessitates an ongoing negotiation with, and an ethical critique of, one’s own epistemic and existential limitations. This acknowledgement of

finitude takes different forms throughout Resnais's postwar cinema, and in the case of his 1956 documentary *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*), I argue that the aesthetics of self-acknowledgement remains the organizing principle for the film's composition, especially in its recurrent configurations of the frame within a perceptual matrix of evil. In this way, the film serves as a distinctive cinematic response not only to Adorno's claims regarding art's "double character" (i.e., that art is simultaneously autonomous and reified), or what he otherwise calls art's "unsolvable aporia" (i.e., that art diminishes the very suffering to which it bears witness), but also to the aporetic tension that characterizes the relationship between art and technological enframing in Heidegger's critique of the modern epoch. Rather than seeking to resolve such impasse or double bind, Resnais's *Night and Fog* confronts the question concerning the representability of historical trauma on the immeasurable scale of the Holocaust by reflexively preserving these tensions and interrogating the constraints and complicities of the cinematic medium itself. In this way, the film expands on the conditions of radical empathy formulated in *Van Gogh* by mobilizing an aesthetics of acknowledging finitude that incorporates moral culpability.

Further elaborating on the ethical possibilities of an aesthetics of acknowledgement that organize the narrative and formal structures of his early documentaries, Chapter Three focuses on Resnais's first feature-length film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) as developing a sustained meditation on the relationship between skepticism and cinema in order to bring to sharper focus the profound existential costs that such acknowledgement must entail. The chapter first offers a close reading of the film's lengthy prologue, organized around the coupling archival fiction and non-fiction footage of Hiroshima's atomic destruction in 1945 with contemporary footage of various locations of the city's reconstruction, all of which is accompanied by a voiceover

dialogue regarding the epistemic veracity of claims to perceptual authority between the film's two unnamed protagonists, a French actress (Emmanuelle Riva) and a Japanese architect (Okada Eiji). Here, Resnais maintains striking consistency with his earlier projects by reflexively interrogating the aporia between the necessity of representation as a site of memory and the impossibility of any representational act to speak the contingent specificity of historical and individual trauma, and the dialogical form of the voiceover – as opposed to the single commentator of his documentaries – performs two important functions that become especially crucial for the film's later fictional narrative. First, by centering on the French actress's attempt at making a fraught case for her claims to insight into Hiroshima's atomic tragedy, the prologue establishes a link between focalization and its critique not only of the expressed content of the focalized perspective but also of the very representational strategies that give it shape. Second, the prologue's turn to the cinematic archive, the formal composition of which corresponds to the French actress's own appeal to some evidential quality of cinematic representation, signals a significant shift whereby the weight of perception is uprooted from its preliminary grounding on epistemic veracity and is gradually pushed toward an acknowledgement of groundlessness that explicitly evokes helplessness and despair. Thus, the initial emphasis placed on epistemological finitude (i.e., reason) gives way to a reflection on existential finitude (i.e., agency). The fictional narrative that directly follows the prologue is structured around exploring the affective manifestations of this existential finitude, and through a reading of the film alongside Heidegger's account of anxiety, I argue that we can complicate the prevalent criticisms of the film as perpetuating a Eurocentric instrumentalization of the Other's suffering by examining how the film privileges the European character's perspective only to situate it within a broader narrative and formal economy of disavowal, in which perceptual agency is gradually and

deliberately emptied out. That is, the film's mode of addressing the radical negativity of a traumatic event is distinguished by its attempt at reflexively attending to a demand for acknowledging one's own radical negativity.

Chapter Four advances along this conceptual trajectory by delineating how the affective manifestations of disavowal in Resnais's 1968 film *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* is articulated by a profound passivity that is inextricably bound up with the film's frame. Once the protagonist, Claude Ridder (Claude Rich), is mysteriously selected to be the first human test subject for a time traveling experiment, he is administered a sedative that will ensure that he remains – in the words of one of the scientists – a “passive subject,” before being escorted into the time machine where he lies down on a fleshly mass that cradles the contours of his body. When the time machine goes into effect, Ridder's body flickers and fades before disappearing altogether. What follows are his travels to various moments of his past, but it becomes immediately clear that it is not his body in his present state that is preserved as he is transported through time. There is neither a doubling that would result from the Ridder of the present encountering his former iterations, nor a replacement as if his consciousness has somehow acquired the ability to re-embody a former self. Both of these tropes of the time travel narrative confer a conventional level of agency that is entirely stripped away from Ridder. What then becomes of his body when it vanishes from the time machine? Through close readings of the film, I argue that the vehicular body that transports the protagonist in his time travels – and through which not only the film's viewer but also Ridder himself experiences the past – is that of the cinematic form, and by operating both non-diegetically (i.e., the absence of mutual recognition between the itself and the world of the past) and diegetically (i.e., it carries the time-traveling Ridder's embodied perspective), the frame of the film bears out an irresolvable tension that has been at work in

Resnais's previous films: through functioning as the very means by which Ridder is able to revisit the past, the frame discloses a world, and yet, at the same time, it forecloses any intervention. That is, built into the very conditions by which it affords a horizon of possibility is its intrinsic limitations. In the specific case of *Je t'aime*, however, this aporia is explicitly couched in the film's manifold configurations of passivity. Through a survey of how passivity has traditionally been understood in the history of discourses surrounding film spectatorship, I show that the film poses problems to the predominant view that polemically conceives of passivity as associated with various social, ethical, or political plights that need to be overcome. By drawing on Heidegger's critique of "the will to will," which is consistent with his critique of enframing, as forsaking its own finitude and on his formulation of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) as an alternative mode of being attuned that, nonetheless, calls for attending to the aporetic tension between willing and non-willing, the chapter demonstrates that *Je t'aime*'s construction of passivity attends to the various limits of experience and, in doing so, attempts to think non-willingly.

The broader methodological aim for the chapters is in contributing to the growing literature on the relationship between film and philosophy. However, instead of relegating film to a merely demonstrative status in relation to philosophy or bearing out some notion that film is performing or doing philosophy, each chapter offers rigorous close readings of films to explicate significant moments wherein the work's formal composition prompts difficult epistemic, aesthetic, and ethical questions in ways that intersect with – and even intervene on – major philosophical concerns. In the case of Resnais and Heidegger, the binding thread is a commitment to aporias as conceptual sites of investigation and as structural forms that shape their respective projects. For both filmmaker and philosopher, I argue that the different

articulations of an acknowledgement of epistemic and existential finitude underwrite a shared approach that preserves the irresolvability of aporetic tensions and manifests their generative possibilities. Thus, in Chapter One, Resnais's *Van Gogh* and Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" are interwoven not only in a way so that Heidegger's insights into the aporetic structure of disclosure in artworks elucidates the unique tensions that organize Resnais's cinematic constructions of worldhood but also in order to draw on the insights provided by Resnais's film to provide an original defense of Heidegger's reading of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of shoes against the kind of criticism that has been most prominently articulated by art historian Meyer Schapiro. Chapter Two places Resnais's *Night and Fog* in dialogue with Heidegger's account of modern technology to situate the film's reflexive interrogation of the irresolvable tension between representation and instrumentalization within a broader postwar philosophical discourse surrounding the question concerning the possibility of art as a site of resistance. Doing so will also help develop a case against the prominent criticism that Heidegger's philosophy of technology is aporetic by delineating how, for both film and philosopher, this aporetic structure is determinative and generative. Chapters Three and Four take up anxiety and releasement as affective manifestations of finitude in Heidegger's thought in order to read the narrative and formal structures of *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* as organized around the disavowals of epistemic authority and subjective agency. I argue that it is precisely this kind of disavowal that characterizes the profound costs demanded of any ethics grounded on an acknowledgement of finitude.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WORLD-DISCLOSURE IN RESNAIS'S *VAN GOGH*

#### I. Introduction

A common way by which Resnais's films are characterized as modernist has been to describe his "intellectual cinema" as one that is highly "subjective" in its representation of mental processes. For instance, Haim Callev's 1997 book *The Stream of Consciousness in the Films of Alain Resnais* forges a link between the titular narrational device that is a pervasive feature of literary high modernism and Resnais's own "cinematic representation of mental processes occurring in the minds of fictional characters."<sup>1</sup> More recently, András Bálint Kovács in his taxonomic study *Screening Modernism* identifies abstraction, subjectivity, and reflexivity as "the main formal principles" of postwar modernist films, and he categorizes Resnais's feature films of this period under the genre of "the mental journey."<sup>2</sup> However, although Resnais's films are marked by a high degree of the fragmentation, abstraction, and reflexivity that has come to typify postwar modernist cinema, I will argue that they in fact challenge this emphasis on subjective interiority and mental states.

This chapter will examine how this is made evident in Resnais's first commercially distributed non-fiction film *Van Gogh* (1948), and placing it in conversation with Heidegger's own treatment of one of the painter's works in his "The Origin of the Work of Art" will reveal some important insights into what is at stake not only in Resnais's formal resistance to an assumed accessibility and representability of subjective interiority but also his distinctive

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<sup>1</sup> Haim Callev, *The Stream of Consciousness in the Films of Alain Resnais* (New York: McGruer Publishing, 1997), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema*, pp. 104-111.

cinematic approach to the relationship between frame and world. That is, by disavowing assumptions surrounding the accessibility and representability of something like internal mental content, Resnais's distinctive staging of subjectivity and empathy is inextricably bound up with his cinematic constructions of world.

## II. Minding the Frame

First shot in 16mm in 1948 and re-filmed a year later in 35mm, Resnais's *Van Gogh* garnered international recognition for the young filmmaker, receiving awards at the Venice Biennale in 1948 along with an Oscar in 1950 in the best two-reel short subject category. Visually comprised entirely of Van Gogh's paintings that were exhibited at Paris's Orangerie at the time, the film opens with a series of fixed shots linked by dissolves from one painting to another. The sequence is accompanied by music and voice-over narration in a manner that seems consistent with the conventional paradigm of art documentaries. But with each successive shot, the film accumulates a number of formal features that clearly establish the film's disinterest in biographical intentionality or chronological fidelity. With the announcement of a specific date, "December 1883," the first painting we see is Van Gogh's 1883 black-and-white piece "Landscape with a Church at Twilight." Already, though not as pronounced as it will become later, Resnais sets up the film's disavowal of an identity between the film's frame and the painting's frame, cropping the image so as to leave much of the expansive sky and surrounding fields off-screen. The film then dissolves to the painting "Landscape at Sunset," which is accompanied by the narration: "The cold weighs heavily on the swampy plains." Here, the image is also cropped, but there are two additional visual and temporal disparities between painting and cinematic representation. First, while the original is in color, the cinematic image –



characteristic of the film in its entirety – remains black and white. As a result, the subtle hues in the original painting that demarcate the foregrounded figure of a person walking along a path is obscured in the film image, and the absence of the original's warm colors that strongly convey the titular sunset makes it impossible to accurately determine the time of day. Second, the painting doesn't correspond to the film's narrational time. Rather than depicting Nuenen during the winter of 1883, the painting is dated to April 1885, and the full foliage of the trees in the background demonstrates the seasonal incongruity.

This experimentation continues shortly thereafter with the tenth shot, which presents Van Gogh's 1885 "Poplars Near Nuenen" and offers the film's first use of a mobile frame as if to underscore the state of transition that is stated by the narrator: "Trying to express his love for mankind in another way, he revealed himself as painter." The work's titular trees that loom over the lane occupy much of the space in the original, but the shot begins with a close-up that isolates the figure of a laborer presumably raking leaves along a path. From here, the camera slowly tracks to the left to reveal two women, one of whom appears to be wearing a white cap. As if operating as a cut-in to a close-up, the film cuts away to the 1885 piece "Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap," before cutting back to the "Poplars" painting with an even closer shot that centers on the two women. The film then tracks upward away from the women to center the frame on a church tower in the background. At this point, the film cuts to a different painting "Old Church Tower at Nuenen," which then dissolves to another painting of what seems to be the same tower during a different season "The Old Cemetery at Nuenen in the Snow," before cutting back to the image of the church tower in "Poplars." The film tracks to the left again to display the trees in the foreground and the horizon that surrounds the church in the background, before finally abandoning the painting. If Resnais's compositional scheme here of tracking the

frame across the painting, cutting into certain details, and cutting away to other images to create spatially and temporally disparate connections between shared features is not motivated by the subjective gaze or movement of its human figures, who remain either indistinct or interchangeable with those represented in other portraits, then what is the motivational mechanism for Resnais's aesthetic decisions?

Already in its first few minutes, *Van Gogh* is thus structured by patterns of disparity – employing black-and-white film that clearly contrasts with the bright colors of the paintings, close-ups that isolate and detach specific details from the holistic context of each work, tracking shots that engender a sense of movement to an otherwise inanimate medium, graphic matches that open images up beyond their frames, and non-chronological ordering. While amounting to a willful undermining of the integrity of the individual paintings, the film is using these formal strategies to create curious linkages between them based on visual relations of contiguity. But their significance is not clear. If merely serving to show, according to the narration, that Nuenen “becomes an album of images” for the artist, why not offer a linear montage of Van Gogh's most prominent paintings of this period? Phrased differently, what new insights does Resnais gain by seeking and establishing these contiguous correlations both within and beyond the frames of each painting?

In order to begin to address these questions and to highlight Resnais's alterity in contrast to conventions of the genre, let us briefly examine the formal and narrative patterns of an exemplary film by Luciano Emmer, whose prolific body of work established him as a master in postwar *film sur l'art* and whose style was explicitly invoked as a desired model by Gaston Diehl

when he approached Resnais to take on the Van Gogh project.<sup>3</sup> Emmer's highly influential collaboration with Enrico Gras, *Racconto da un affresco* (1938), focuses on the specific frames from Giotto's massive fourteenth-century Scrovegni Chapel fresco cycle that depict the narrative scenes of Christ. By using a wide range of cinematic techniques – including camera movement, continuity editing, perspectival framing, and dramatic music – Emmer sought to express a sensational and coherent story. One such powerful sequence depicts King Herod's Slaughter of the Innocents, in which he called for the execution of all male children in Bethlehem under two years old. Directly following the film's opening with the nativity scene, there is a sudden cut to a close-up of King Herod accompanied by a sharp shift in music from the smoothly articulated melody of reverential strings in the preceding scene to deep and pulsing brass notes. The film cuts to a long shot to establish that King Herod is looking out from his tower and pointing to something that lies off-screen to the right of the frame, which soon after begins to pan diagonally downward following the deictic line to reveal that his finger is pointing to a massacre on the streets below. Because of the movement of the shot, which is pulled into a specific portion of Giotto's larger image, the restricted visual field first draws attention to the women – some of whom, including the first woman to appear in the frame, seem to be looking up to Herod pleading and/or protesting. Emmer's frame comes to a rest as it centers on a woman clutching the ankle of her baby as a henchman wrests him away, while another guard is raising a spear against another baby who is still in his mother's arms. Following this shot is a quick cut to a close-up of the guard with the spear, and while this image is the focal point of Giotto's original frame, Emmer's cinematic presentation of the painting instead guides the viewer's experience

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<sup>3</sup> "Luciano Emmer," *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film, Volume I*, edited by Ian Aitken (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 341; Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 23.

along a matrix of eyelines that filters the narrative weight of the tragedy through the perspective of the subjects who are witnessing or participating.

This perceptual matrix continues as the film cuts from the close-up of the armed guard to a close-up of a two shot that features the woman holding her child away from the guard and another woman behind her who is clutching onto the ankle of the baby that has been taken away.<sup>4</sup> As if providing us with a shot that matches on the action implied by the guard who has been readying himself with the spear, the film then cuts to a close-up of the baby's lower body, where his mother's hand grips him closer to her and where his calf is clenched by the hand of the guard. Just in these three shots – the guard's brutal poise, the woman's reaction, and the body on which the violence of the decree will be played out – we can see how the cinematic presentation of the painting imposes a dramatic plot that orders the sequencing of events that occur simultaneously in Giotto's original piece. Thus, Emmer provides a temporal continuity that links intention up with deed, resulting in a cinematic composition which in every respect conforms to storytelling conventions that are dependent upon an essential interrelationship between narrative motivation and character identification.

Steven Jacobs, in his historical study of the intersections of cinema, painting, and photography, situates Resnais's art documentaries within the tradition that has been established by renown figures in the genre – such as Emmer, Henri Storck, and Paul Haesaerts – while also distinguishing Resnais's work for its apparent interest in mental interiority: “the story is rather told from within the painter's mind.”<sup>5</sup> In order to substantiate this view, Jacobs maintains that

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the narrative motivation for why Emmer chose here to feature the woman holding her child in a two shot with another struggling woman instead of a centered close-up is clarified shortly thereafter when the film shifts its focus from one character to the other. In other words, the two shot functions as an establishing point that the film cuts into in order to focus on one character's perspective before delving into that of the other.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, p. 26.

the film conforms to classical narrative conventions of subjective identification. For instance, he reads Van Gogh into Resnais's film's configuration of the paintings by interpreting a figure in a landscape as the artist himself or by rendering instances of the cinematic frame's movement through different spaces as perspectival shots that belong to the artist's subjectivity.

Furthermore, Jacobs goes so far as to state that this "cinematic logic can also be found in the sequence in which an old Dutch farmer's wife enters a house and Resnais even creates the equivalent of a reverse shot."<sup>6</sup> However, it is precisely this unusual sequence of shots featuring the paintings of what Jacobs refers to as "an old Dutch farmer's wife" that not only demonstrates the sharp differences between Resnais's and Emmer's aesthetics but also complicates the claim regarding *Van Gogh*'s adherence to norms of establishing subjective identification and thus the claim that the film is representing some sort of interiority.

Directly following the sequence involving the "Poplars" painting, *Van Gogh* cuts to a shot of the 1885 painting "The Cottage," which features a woman in a white cap with her back to us peering into one of the two doorways of the house. The film then offers a close-up that centers the camera's frame on the woman and one of these entrances, before cutting to one of the many portraits entitled "Head of a Woman," depicting a woman in a white cap – her gaze directed at something off-screen to the right of the frame. Without revealing what it is that she might be looking at, the film cuts back to "The Cottage," this time isolating the other, empty doorway so as to suggest that the woman has disappeared into the home. The question arises: to what extent does this sequence of shots reveal something about psychological interiority? If identification is a factor here at all, it might be more appropriate to align the viewer's subjective orientation with that of the woman. Indeed, in regards to this sequence, André Bazin writes,

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, p. 26.

“Resnais has even risked a reverse shot of an old Dutch peasantwoman entering her house,” suggesting that we are more attuned to the represented content in the painting than to the activity of the painter.<sup>7</sup> However, shifting the planes of identification from Van Gogh as artist to peasant woman as character says very little about any inner subjectivity, as the film refuses to offer any further narrative context about the woman – e.g., where she is coming from, what her intentions are in entering the home, and what her gaze is registering. Any sense of psychological interiority, whether of Van Gogh or the peasant woman, is closed off. Instead, the veneer of what Bazin refers to as an apparent reverse shot is formed out of relations of contingent contiguity rather than conventions of narrative motivation.

Despite these contentions, the conclusion that Jacobs reaches is consistent with the prevalent way that Resnais’s cinema has been aligned with modernism. Scholars have explained the aesthetic gains that result from his cinematic manipulations of Van Gogh’s paintings by underscoring their apparent representation of subjective interiority. To be sure, this approach to the film is anchored in the oft-cited statement by Resnais in his 1948 *Ciné-Club* article, “Une Expérience,” in which he claims that the aim of the documentary was “to find out whether painted trees, painted people, painted houses could, thanks to editing, fulfill the role of real objects and whether, in this case, it was possible to substitute for the spectator and almost without his knowing it, the interior world of the artist in place of the world as it is revealed by photography.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, Roy Armes maintains that the film “tries to put us in Van Gogh’s

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<sup>7</sup> André Bazin, “Painting and Cinema,” *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, edited and translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Roy Armes, *The Cinema of Alain Resnais* (London: Zwemmer Limited, 1968), p. 38. Despite Resnais’s reference to interiority here, the reading of his film that this chapter proposes is far more concerned with the cited passage’s suggestively tenuous distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic worlds and the possibility of their interchangeability. Such a distinction is further complicated when we consider that, for Resnais, the artist’s so-called interiority is one that is imagined, which can be drawn from his interview with Truffaut, where he states that the film was “an attempt to tell the imaginary life of a painter through his painting.” Quoted in Roy Armes, pp. 39-40.

head,” Emma Wilson writes that it conjures “the subjective images of that world perceived by the artist and captured by him on canvas,” and Jacobs claims that the film provides “narrative links between images of an internal and mental world.”<sup>9</sup>

While reading *Van Gogh* in terms of psychological interiority may not necessarily lead to an interpretive commitment to Cartesian inner/outer and mind/body dualisms, the intuition falls short for a number of reasons. First, it nonetheless runs the risk of inadvertently mapping these loaded binaries onto a cinematic project that formally resists them.<sup>10</sup> Second, it fails to explain what working theory of mind underwrites the assumptions regarding the tenability of positing psychological interiority, the reducibility of consciousness to interior mechanisms or states, and the representability of such mechanisms or states as mental or aesthetic images.<sup>11</sup> Third, even if such a reductive theory were developed in the context of film analysis, it’s not clear how invoking the cinematic representability of psychological interiority helps us better understand the idiosyncratic stylistic features of *Van Gogh*. Finally, these readings yield too much to what Daniel Morgan calls an “epistemological fantasy” that underlies the theoretical impulse to ascribe explanatory primacy to point of view. That is, the claim that Resnais’s film “tries to put us in Van Gogh’s head” is an expression of “the fantasy that we will be given access to special,

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<sup>9</sup> Armes, p. 40; Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 18; and Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Any attempt to defend the explanatory efficacy of such psychologically representationalist terminology by pointing to Deleuze’s formulation of Resnais’s work as a “cinema of the brain” would rest on an essential misunderstanding of what Deleuze means by the brain: “My eye, my brain, are images, parts of my body. How could my brain contain images since it is one image among others?” See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 58. For an account of both how this critical impulse to attribute cinema with the capacity to externalize mental processes can be traced back to Hugo Munsterberg and also how Deleuze challenges such a theoretical framework, see D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 18-37.

<sup>11</sup> For phenomenologically holistic accounts of embodied consciousness that each develop sustained criticisms of internalist theories of mind, see Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993); John Haugeland, “Mind Embodied and Embedded,” *Having Thought: Essays in the Metaphysics of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 207-237; Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004); and Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

private knowledge,” namely by positing the camera as a “perceptual anchor or surrogate for the viewer.” If we, following Morgan, treat such a fantasy as a temptation – rather than a fact – “that can be used and exploited by films for various ends,” then to what end does *Van Gogh* exploit semblances of continuity and false expectations of epistemic access?<sup>12</sup>

After the shot of the empty entrance in “The Cottage” that implies that the woman in the white cap has gone inside and that perhaps underscores the elusive quality of attempting to determine some narrated subjectivity, the film cuts to the 1884 painting “Weaver Near an Open Window” – at first offering a close-up of the window, through which we see a woman in a white cap working out in the fields, and then cutting to a long shot that establishes the interior space of the building where we see a man operating a weaving loom. Are we to assume that the woman in “The Cottage” who presumably entered her home is now shown through a window working outside, or is that same woman witnessing the weaving from inside the space she just entered? Perhaps these are simply the wrong questions to ask. Even more puzzling is that Resnais then decides to cut back to the empty doorway in “The Cottage,” pans the frame to the left toward the other doorway where we can see the contours of the woman in the white cap (who presumably, according to the conventions of narrative continuity and coherence, has already entered the home), cuts in to a close-up of a bright flower that sits on the sill of a window, and then cuts away to a close-up of the lamp that illuminates the space of the famous 1885 painting “The Potato Eaters.” Rather than positing that such movements are motivated by subjective experiences that are somehow internal to the artist or a figure in his image, what bears more promise is thinking through the film’s careful composition of frames – the frame of the camera, the frame of the paintings, and, the frame of the doorway, and the frame of the windows – and

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Morgan, “Where are We?: Camera Movements and the Problem of Point of View,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (2016): pp. 229, 240-242.



their relationship to another key concept that Resnais's own description of the film invokes: world.

In his essay, "Painting and Cinema," Bazin distinguishes the frame of a painting from the frame of a film by claiming that whereas the former is centripetal in that it "polarizes space inwards," the latter is centrifugal in that it "*seems* to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe."<sup>13</sup> The ontological distinctiveness of the cinematic frame rests not on an actual vastness of the continuity and coherence of off-screen space but, rather, on its very possibility. Bazin writes:

If we show a section of a painting on a screen, the space of the painting loses its orientation and its limits and is presented to the imagination as without any boundaries. Without losing its other characteristics the painting thus takes on the spatial properties of cinema and becomes part of that 'picturable' world that lies beyond it on all sides.<sup>14</sup>

This helps explain Resnais's project. By placing portions of Van Gogh's works within a film frame and by manipulating these paintings via the formal strategies that I've delineated above, Resnais's film reconstitutes parts-whole relations such that the whole is no longer confined either to the frame of an individual painting or to Van Gogh's output in its entirety. Nor is the whole to be associated with some elusive mental content. Rather, in forging a semblance of continuity and coherence through disparate and fragmented features spread across a variety of paintings, the film constantly gestures toward a "picturable world" that lies off-screen. That is, the whole is recast in terms of a possible world – one that is not pre-constituted within Van Gogh's mind but, instead, that is co-constituted at the site of contact between the paintings, Resnais's cinematic presentation, and the film's viewer.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," p. 166, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> For an insightful reading of Mikel Dufrenne's phenomenological aesthetics that yields an account of this co-constitutive nexus as emerging from the intersection of cinematic temporalities – the actual, the represented, and the experienced – see Daniel Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 201-206. While the current project is not particularly concerned with defining aesthetic

Referring to Bazin's account of *Van Gogh*, Dudley Andrew attempts to further specify the relationship between frame and world by maintaining that Resnais "is concerned not with the *frame* but with *framing*, which is a quest to explore a world beyond the self."<sup>16</sup> Although Andrew doesn't take it far enough, this is a key insight. According to Stanley Cavell, not only does the photographic image as a medium composed by automatic processes overcome the subjectivity associated with the determinations of creative agency that he claims is a core feature of romanticism, but the cinematic screen also operates to screen the viewer out from the world that it presents. That is, the "endless presence of self" of romanticism is displaced by the "presentness of the world" – "to let the world happen" – secured by cinema's automatic modes of reproduction.<sup>17</sup> Cavell's ontological account of film need not be taken to suggest that cinema qua cinema intrinsically forecloses any attempts at delineating subjectivity as an explanatory mechanism. Rather, attending to Cavell's arguments shows that the emphatic shift from self to world raises problems for any attempt to place exclusive explanatory primacy on psychological identification in thinking about the cinema. It's in this way that Resnais's *Van Gogh* calls attention to the cinematic frame's exploratory and constitutive relation to worlds in a way that troubles the prevalent critical impulse to posit the filmic representation of mental contents not just as a key component of what distinguishes Resnais's cinema as "modernist" but, more problematically, as a sufficient ground for interpretation.

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worlds generally as much as elucidating how Resnais specifically constructs a cinematic mode of world disclosure, Yacavone's work is notable not only for its theoretically pluralistic yet systematically sustained effort of delineating cinematic worlds as symbolic, transformative, singular, and immersive but also for its sophisticated defense of privileging an account of authorship that nonetheless is careful to maintain a moderate view on artistic intentionality that recognizes how cinematic worlds exceed biographical and psychological determinations. See Daniel Yacavone, *Film Worlds*, p. 14 and pp. 214-222.

<sup>16</sup> Dudley Andrew, "Malraux, Bazin, and the Gesture of Picasso," *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and its Afterlife*, edited by Dudley Andrew with Hervé Joubert-Laurencin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 22-25.

Yet, questions still arise. If Resnais's film can be understood as one that charts out "a world beyond the self," what would an account of such aesthetic worlds look like? That is, how precisely does a work of art "let the world happen?"

### III. Opening Up of a World

In his 1936 Frankfurt lecture "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger painstakingly makes a case for how art as a work that sets up a world – i.e., its "opening up of a world" – undercuts the subjectivism that he associates with the modern epoch. For Heidegger, "modern subjectivism" designates the particular way in which the world has been made intelligible according to substance ontologies and metaphysics of subjectivity that have established as a ground the presupposition of binaries between subject and object, between interior consciousness and exterior materiality. Man is transformed into a *subjectum* – one which is bestowed with an "unlimited power for the calculating, planning, and molding of all things" – and the world is transformed into a "picture," which Heidegger defines as "the structured image that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before."<sup>18</sup> Such a framework of understanding is not restricted to the domain of philosophy; it manifests itself through the technological, industrial, political, and social structures of the modern world. In particular, its mark on aesthetics pertains not only to the industry of art collection and exhibition but also to the more basic conceptualization of artworks as objects either of subjective expression or subjective impression.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," pp. 134 and 135.

<sup>19</sup> In the essay "The Age of the World Picture" delivered as a lecture in 1938, Heidegger claims that with modern subjectivism, the work of art "becomes the object of mere subjective experience" and is "considered to be an expression of human life." Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," p. 116. For a lucid treatment of Heidegger's account of how traditional aesthetics is rooted in subjectivism, see Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), pp. 45-53.

Thus, in the first part of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger delineates a number of ways by which the being of things are understood according to our subjectivist metaphysics: “as a bearer of traits, as the unity of a manifold of sensations, as formed matter.”<sup>20</sup> Heidegger is drawing on his 1927 magnum opus on fundamental ontology *Being and Time*, in which he refers to this way in which objects reveal themselves as “presence-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*) and maintains that it presupposes a more primordial relation to things, which he calls “readiness-to-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*) – designating a pre-cognitive understanding of equipment that is thoroughly situated in and determined by a constellation of habituated cultural practices.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is when equipment is revealed in terms of their readiness-to-hand that the subject-object binary becomes cast as a merely theoretical phenomenon derivative of a co-constitutive and holistic being-in-the-world. If the “equipmental character of equipment” resists the explanatory efficacy of substance ontologies, Heidegger here makes the claim that artworks allow us to “discover what a piece of equipment truly is.”<sup>22</sup> The question then that the essay takes up as its initial line of investigation is how precisely artworks can disclose such truth about the entities they reveal without sharing the same condition of absorptive use that distinguishes ready-to-hand equipment. Put differently, if according to *Being and Time* the equipment we encounter in a non-thematic and circumspective way discloses the world as always already presupposed by the totality of

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> For Heidegger’s formulation of readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand as distinctive ways in which we encounter the being of entities in the world, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 95-107. It is important to note that in this work, the term for the being that uses the equipment – the term for whom its very being is an issue – is *Dasein*. In avoiding terms such as “subject” or “self,” Heidegger’s aim is to develop an account of how *Dasein* and the world are co-constitutively bound up with each other. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 158. For an account of how “The Origin of the Work of Art” signals an important moment in Heidegger’s philosophical project as acknowledging and attempting to overcome the problem that arises from *Being and Time*’s ascription of originariness to equipmental readiness-to-hand when placed in the context of his lifelong grappling with the subjective dominion entailed by modernity’s metaphysical framework, see Hans Sluga, “Ge-stell: Enframing as the Essence of Technology,” *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, edited by Bret W. Davis (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010), pp. 183-194.

references and assignments that shape the means and ends of our activities,<sup>23</sup> what sort of worlds are disclosed by artworks and what distinguishes this mode of disclosure?

It is to address these questions that Heidegger turns to Van Gogh's painting of "a pair of peasant shoes." For reasons that will be made clear below, it is important to note that it is not clear which painting Heidegger is referring to; indeed, he himself recognizes that Van Gogh "painted such shoes several times."<sup>24</sup> After attributing the shoes in question to a peasant woman, Heidegger offers a lengthy and fascinating narrative inspired by the shoe's distinctive features:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles stretches the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.<sup>25</sup>

There is a great deal of poetic liberty taken in the passage's imagination of the sort of world opened up by the painting. But we can see significant affinities with Resnais's film. With its invocation of a "field swept by a raw wind," "the dampness and richness of the soil," the isolation of a "field path as evening falls," and "the fallow desolation of the wintry field," Heidegger's descriptions strikingly parallel the selected imagery that dominates the Nuenen section of *Van Gogh*. Furthermore, there is a similarity in how both Heidegger and Resnais gesture toward inhabitants of these depicted spaces as apparent perspectival centers. For instance, Resnais's tenuous use of continuity editing to establish what seems to be a peasant

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 158.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 159-160.

woman's perspective resonates with Heidegger's own attribution to the peasant woman not only the shoes but also the "uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread" and "wordless joy of having once more withstood want." Yet, as Resnais's cinematic exploration of Van Gogh's paintings is not dependent on some form of character identification, Heidegger also avoids resting his ontology of artworks on the peasant woman's subjectivity. For both Resnais and Heidegger, what lies at the center of their approaches to Van Gogh is the issue of world-disclosure – in one case this takes place by way of cinema, in the other by way of philosophy.<sup>26</sup>

This last point is especially important in light of art historian Meyer Schapiro's well-known criticism of the inaccuracies in Heidegger's description of the painting, which Schapiro – through a correspondence with the philosopher and subsequent archival cross-referencing – claims is the 1886 work entitled "A Pair of Shoes."<sup>27</sup> The critique centers on Heidegger's attribution of the shoes to a peasant woman. According to Schapiro, the shoes in the painting are not what Dutch farmers wore in the fields but are instead common urban boots that more likely belonged to the artist. Thus, Heidegger not only projects "his own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthy" but also overlooks "an important aspect of the painting: the artist's presence in the work."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that Heidegger's philosophical engagement with Van Gogh is an equivalent to Resnais's own uniquely cinematic appropriations of the artist's works, but I don't wish to completely discount this intuition either.

<sup>27</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object: A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh," *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), p. 136.

<sup>28</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object," pp. 138-139. Much has been written about this debate. For defenses of Heidegger, which range from undermining Schapiro's interpretation of Heidegger or identifying irresolvable methodological differences to maintaining that Heidegger's project is more generally concerned with how beings are disclosed rather than the disclosure of any specific being or taking this problematic latter viewpoint further by claiming that the Van Gogh reading is irrelevant, see Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art"* (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 85-93; Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Artworks* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), pp. 127-132; Babette E. Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers: Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 201-218; Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 5, 22. For Derrida's dialogical intervention on this debate, in which he frames the exchange between Heidegger and Schapiro as constituting an interlacing pair of distinct yet mutually flawed interpretations that are motivated – or perhaps haunted – by competing desires for

I want to suggest that Schapiro's critique of Heidegger shares a conceptual kinship with the scholarship on Resnais positing that *Van Gogh* cinematically represents the subjective interiority of the artist. That is, Schapiro's primary method of seeking out "the artist's presence" in Heidegger's descriptions – in demanding attribution veracity – literalizes what Daniel Morgan calls an "epistemological fantasy" by staking the terms of attribution on the subjectivity of the artist. This is underscored when Schapiro ends his critique with an appeal to Gauguin's reminiscence of an exchange he had with Van Gogh, with whom he roomed in Arles, about a pair of shoes that the latter made a painting of and preserved. Through Gauguin's recounting of this conversation, we discover that Van Gogh wore those shoes early in his life when he served as a young pastor to the miners in Belgium's Borinage, where he experienced a vision of Christ in a badly injured miner that he had helped rehabilitate. Schapiro writes, "It is not certain which of the paintings with a single pair of shoes Gauguin had seen at Arles...It does not matter. Though written some years later, and with some literary affectations, Gauguin's story confirms the essential fact that for Van Gogh the shoes were a memorable piece of his own life, a sacred relic."<sup>29</sup> Thus, the veracity of details in Gauguin's poetic description of Van Gogh's painting is considered irrelevant insofar as it gives access to some private biographical and psychological knowledge that presumably satisfies a demand for the "artist's presence."

However, as is made clear in the critique of modern subjectivism and traditional aesthetics that prompts his discussion of the Van Gogh painting, Heidegger is not predicating his philosophical account of art on precisely what he explicitly states as needing to be overcome, namely the primacy of subjective presencing and representation. Therefore, Heidegger cannot

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personal and historical restitution, see Jacques Derrida, "Restitutions," *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 255-382.

<sup>29</sup> Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object," pp. 140-141.

stake his argument on the subjective experiences of either the peasant woman or – even if he were aware of the various details that Schapiro accuses him of getting wrong – the artist. To do so would betray what motivates his discussion of the painting: an attempt at distinguishing the mode of disclosure unique to artworks from the mode of disclosure that characterizes the serviceability of equipment. Whether the world is non-thematically and pre-cognitively revealed as readiness-to-hand, in which projects have a mutually constitutive relationship with the equipment in use, or the world is thematically and propositionally revealed as presence-at-hand, in which the theoretical paradigm that construes subject as consciousness and object as bearing properties becomes possible, the serviceability of equipment operates contextually within an account of worldhood that centers on use and control. Thus, in proposing that art reveals the world in an altogether different way through his description of the Van Gogh painting, Heidegger is claiming that the artwork expresses an imaginary perspective that exploits the epistemological desire to identify with a subjective point of view in order to demonstrate how the painting *exceeds* the primacy of control that underlies not only the serviceability of equipment but also metaphysical and aesthetic subjectivism. This could not be achieved if emphasis was placed on the authority and ownership of the artist; instead, what Babette Babich calls the “hermeneutic story” that Heidegger gives of an imaginary farmer is aimed at phenomenologically attuning us to the workings of this excess, which is a key feature of what he refers to as “earth.”<sup>30</sup>

Heidegger’s encounter with the painting introduces two major concepts: world and earth, the resulting tension between which characterizes a work of art’s distinctive mode of revealing. World, according to Heidegger, “is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of the simple

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<sup>30</sup> Babette E. Babich, *Words in Blood, Like Flowers*, p. 215.



and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people.”<sup>31</sup> Put differently, the world is the entirety of the historically contingent yet normatively binding commitments that allow the being of entities to appear in a given way; it is the referential nexus by which we make sense of things and ourselves.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, earth “is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing.”<sup>33</sup> The earth “shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into a destruction.”<sup>34</sup> In sum, if world opens up certain horizons of intelligibility, then earth not only refuses to be subsumed by these horizons but also constitutes an ontologically necessary site of concealment, of finitude.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly to the account of death in *Being and Time*, the concept of earth operates as a generative limit situation to our ways of understanding being; it is generative because such a limit secured by concealment entails a multiplicity of possibilities of understanding being that are not confined to any given world.<sup>36</sup> Thus, world and earth, for Heidegger, are essentially different yet never separable. He writes, “The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through the world.”<sup>37</sup> It is precisely this relationship – characterized as an essential “strife” – that cashes out what Heidegger refers to as *poiēsis*: a process of bringing forth into “unconcealment.”<sup>38</sup> He writes, “Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 174.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 174.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 172.

<sup>35</sup> For a treatment of how Heidegger’s ambiguous use of the term “nothing” as employed in Heidegger’s 1929 inaugural Freiburg lecture, “What is Metaphysics?” shapes the discussion of earth in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” see Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, pp. 84-90. For an account of Heidegger’s “nothing of plenitude,” see Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>36</sup> See Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, pp. 39-40. For a sophisticated account of existential death not as physical demise but, rather, as a limit situation to Dasein’s ability-to-be, see William Blattner, “The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*,” *Man and World* 27.1 (January 1994): pp. 49-70.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 174.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” p. 21.

curious opposition of presencing, in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealment. The clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, art is a “happening of truth” that is distinct from other modes of revealing, because its poetic projection makes explicit the strife between world and earth that structurally parallels the interplay of revealing and concealing that underlies any possibility for beings to appear in a given way.<sup>40</sup> But how is this strife between world and earth specifically manifest in Van Gogh’s painting? That is, how does the artwork physically bear out Heidegger’s reading that the shoes vibrate with a silent call that is at once a gift and an act of unexplained self-refusal?

Prompted by the passage where Heidegger contrasts how the material of equipment withdraws into its usage against how the material comes forth in the work of art, one prominent approach in the secondary literature has been to associate earth with the work’s materiality. Therefore, when Heidegger states that “the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the brightening and darkening of color, into the clang of tone, and into the naming power of the word,” it has been taken by some to suggest that the artwork’s mode of world-disclosure also reflexively calls attention to – and is constrained by – the materials of its production.<sup>41</sup> However, this reading not only runs the risk of reducing the strife between world and earth as one that resembles the relationship between content and form, but it also relegates Heidegger’s treatment

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 178.

<sup>40</sup> Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 34: “The clearing makes it possible for a certain understanding of being – a particular mode of presence – to come to prevail among entities. For possibilities to be live possibilities, however, it requires a space from which other incompatible possibilities are excluded.”

<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 171. Lee Braver claims that, for Heidegger, a great work of art “is one that creates a strife between what is depicted and the medium used to depict it, allowing us to see both.” See Lee Braver, *Heidegger’s Later Writings* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), p. 52; see also Karsten Harries, *Art Matters*, pp. 115-118. For a critique of this interpretation of earth as materiality, see Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, pp. 48-49.

of the Van Gogh painting to a less important, if not incomprehensible, position in the essay. By contrast, Iain Thomson identifies an important conceptual link between earth and Heidegger's complex and nuanced account of "the nothing" (*das Nicht*):

Like the notorious "nothing" that (Heidegger wrote in 1929) "makes possible the manifestation of entities as such for human existence"...the "earth" is thus Heidegger's name in 1935-36 for what he most frequently calls "being as such," a dynamic phenomenological "presencing" (*Anwesen*) that gives rise to our worlds of meaning without ever being exhausted by them, a dimension of intelligibility we experience *both* as it calls for an informs *and* as it overflows and escapes our attempts to pin it down.<sup>42</sup>

Establishing this connection enables Thomson to more lucidly explicate the strife between world and earth identified by Heidegger in Van Gogh's painting of the shoes. By opening up Heidegger's use of the word "nothing" as conceptually robust, Thomson carefully examines the three different places in Heidegger's treatment of the painting that employ this term. For instance, attending to how the "nothing" is configured into the passage, "Surrounding this pair of farmer's shoes there is nothing, in which and to which they can belong,"<sup>43</sup> Thomson concentrates on the physical space surrounding the shoes and maintains that "one can notice that inchoate forms begin to emerge from the background but never quite take a firm shape; in fact, these shapes tend to disappear when one tries to pin them down."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the painting's background, which is composed of undisclosed possibilities of other shapes and details (perhaps even of other worlds), gestures to that earth against which the foregrounded shoes are made legible; and this interplay between earth and world as presented by the painting serves as the basis for Heidegger's own imaginative description of that very strife that constitutes the peasant woman's world.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 90.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 159; translation modified by Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 85.

<sup>44</sup> Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that while Thomson does not equate Heidegger's concept of the earth to a medium's materiality, he nonetheless recognizes the ineliminable contribution of the physical qualities of the painting itself:

#### IV. Resnais's Cinematic Poiēsis

So far, we have seen how Heidegger's account of art provides a philosophical basis for demonstrating the shortcomings of the common critical impulse to explain Resnais's *Van Gogh* in terms of psychological interiority and also how attending to a close reading of the film's formal resistance to, and exploitation of, the desire for subjective identification has shed light on the shortcomings of criticisms against Heidegger's own engagement with the painter's work. In what follows, I will delineate how Heidegger's formulation of art's distinctive mode of disclosure can elucidate how the film's refusal to provide access to some private and coherent sense of consciousness – its refusal to attribute to representation a means of securing epistemic assurance and dominion – yields its own distinctive understanding of the relationship between frame and world.

Resnais's *Van Gogh* achieves cinematic world-disclosure at an ontological and an ontic level. First, in terms of the ontological, Resnais's very decision to cinematically frame Van Gogh's paintings already exhibits an automatic register that, according to Cavell, will "let the world happen" in a way that the original paintings cannot. There is a vibrant tension between, on the one hand, Bazin's account of the cinematic frame as one that opens out onto an infinitely extendable "picturable world" and, on the other, Cavell's articulation of the cinematic screen as one that "screens me from the world it holds," but it is precisely through this tension that the world-earth strife of artworks is made cinematically manifest. That is, the cinema Resnais envisages is constituted both by a clearing that gestures toward the expansiveness of a diegetic

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"Heidegger seems to have been deeply moved by the way half-formed figures seem to struggle to take shape in the background of Van Gogh's paintings, less in clear lines than in the thick texture of the paint, brush strokes, and deep fields of color." Iain Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 105.

world and by a closure that refuses our grasp by presenting that world as one from which we are screened out. However, if such a reading runs the risk of overdetermination in its applicability to every cinematic instance, what is particularly important about Resnais's cinema is that it is not only deeply aware of this ontological tension between revealing and concealing but also reflexively explores the multiple existential, cultural, and historical facets of this tension in different ways throughout his body of work.

Second, at the level of the ontic, Resnais's *Van Gogh* explicitly stages the world-earth strife in a number of ways. For instance, it is the film's juxtaposition of the paintings "The Cottage" and "Head of a Woman" by way of continuity editing that opens up a world in a way that the individual paintings in isolation cannot. What Bazin identifies as a possible "reverse shot" of the peasant woman, which registers her reaction to, or gaze on, something that occupies the interior of the cottage, gestures toward a perceptual field beyond what the viewer is visually given. If what is conventionally expected is a subsequent eyeline match cut that would make visible the off-screen space, the film instead cuts back to the painting that the sequence began with, "The Cottage." This time, as described above, the frame centers on the empty doorway at the other end of the cottage, thereby cropping out the part of the painting that features the peasant woman, to whom the earlier exterior cut-in drew our attention. Rather than generating confusion over why the film shifts from one of the painting's doorways to the other, the perceptual effect is that the sequence seems to end with the woman disappearing into the cottage. Therefore, while the world of the original cottage painting is extended out onto horizons forged by way of the film's framing and editing strategies, the same formal features posit the interior space of the home – acknowledged by the peasant woman's gaze – as the sequence's sheltering agent by remaining concealed and thereby closing itself off from the viewer's grasp.

The partial narrative generated by the cottage sequence bears important similarities to Heidegger's own inspired description of the peasant farmer prompted by the painting of the shoes. Employing different types of framing, one through philosophical prose and the other through cinema, Heidegger and Resnais map narratives that center on peasant life onto the original compositions not to offer some sort of subjective identification with peasant women but, rather, to explore the interplay between revealing and concealing as it is manifest in the possible worlds opened up by Van Gogh's paintings. While the peasant woman offers a point of convergence that helps draw out the parallels in Resnais's and Heidegger's modes of framing, there are other ways that Resnais's film articulates the strife of earth and world. For instance, much in the same way that Thomson identifies Heidegger's reflection on the "nothing" by examining how the textural qualities of the painting's background bring forth and refuse the perceptual graspability of not only the world of the shoes but also the possibility of other worlds, Resnais's decision to reduce the original artworks' rich use of color schemes to black and white film – which Emma Wilson claims "focuses our attention on the form and shapes" and Richard Barsam claims "helps to convey the movement and intensity" of the paintings – results in new graphic and textural relations.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the film's presentation of the painting "Landscape at Sunset" without color renders indiscernible the borders that distinguish the buildings, that demarcate the path from the fields, and that give shape to the human figure in the foreground. Instead, the film's monochromatic framing of the painting accentuates the incomprehensible inscriptions of the thick rhythmic brush strokes that simultaneously characterize the distinctiveness of the depicted world, threaten its coherence, and gesture toward the possibility of emergent figures. In this way, which is explored repeatedly through the film, Resnais grafts onto

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<sup>46</sup> Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, p. 19; Richard M. Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 262.

the painting a significant tension between the intelligibility and unintelligibility of forms – the functional equivalent of what Heidegger delineates as the crucial interaction between apprehensible figures and the “nothing” that surrounds them.

Another example of the film’s ontic formulation of the strife between world and earth can be found in the organizing principle of its narrative depiction of Van Gogh’s life. According to Jacobs, the film “can be divided into four sequences coinciding with the four places that played an important part in the painter’s life and that represent the four stages of his artistic development: Holland, Paris, Provence, and Auvers-sur-Oise.”<sup>47</sup> If Resnais understands each of the four stages as concurrently opening and closing horizons of possibilities, from which certain styles and themes emerge, then it is especially striking that in anticipating the shift from Nuenen to Paris, the image that follows the narrator’s assertion that “other horizons are calling” is the 1886 painting “A Pair of Shoes” – the very painting Schapiro identifies as the one that Heidegger references. Moreover, the same painting of shoes reemerges toward the end of the Paris segment, following a number of works dated to 1888, as the film transitions to Provence with the narrator stating, “He dreams of deeper joys with other lights.” In addition to the chronological disparity, the reappearance of the painting is accompanied by other formal disruptions: an accelerated musical tempo through which the already dissonant chromatic scales of the film’s score reach a crescendo, and the frame suddenly zooms in quickly toward the shoes at a rate at which the image blurs out of focus before fading to black. Thus, while Heidegger attends to “the nothing” physically inscribed into the painting, Resnais’s film manipulates cinematic framing and time to dissipate the image’s perceptual coherence. And yet, it is by way of this nothing that the film opens out onto the next narrative stage. Such visual and musical distortions will be

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<sup>47</sup> Steven Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, p. 24.

featured more prominently from this point of the film onward as it reaches closer to the end of Van Gogh's life, but the film sets this aesthetic scheme in motion by way of these shoes, thus gesturing toward Van Gogh's eventual death, which the narration foreshadows by stating that "he abandons the grey sky of Paris and runs away towards the sun."<sup>48</sup>

If thus far in the film, what Heidegger refers to as the earth – which outstrips a world's referential nexus of intelligibility – is at work in Resnais's film through cinematic constructions of elision (what is unavailable within the frame), discontinuity (non-linear juxtapositions), and displacement (shifting perceptual focus onto traces of the illegible), then it is at this juncture of the film where the tension between world and earth is most perspicuously woven into the narrative's imagining of the artist's life. As the film transitions into the final stages, the anticipation of his death corresponds with an escalation in the film's formal experimentations, e.g., through an intensification of musical dissonance, successive shots of quick zooms, montage sequences that rapidly cut between his paintings of sunflowers with close-ups of the artist's eyes in his self-portraits (a similar montage sequence later will include images of the sun), a frame that blurs Van Gogh's 1889 "Bedroom in Arles" before floating away from it into complete darkness, and the dizzyingly accelerating repetition of shots tracking up along the bark of an olive tree in Van Gogh's 1889 "Olive Orchard." As a result, the film becomes more explicitly structured around the intertwining of Van Gogh's work, his psychiatric health, and his death in a

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<sup>48</sup> Writing in 1937, Bataille claims, "Van Gogh began to give to the sun a meaning which it had not yet had...At that moment all of his painting finally became *radiation, explosion, flame*, and himself, lost in ecstasy before a source of *radiant* life, *exploding, inflamed*...Death appeared in a sort of transparency." See Georges Bataille, "Van Gogh as Prometheus," translated by Annette Michelson, *October* 36 (Spring 1986), p. 59. See also Georges Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, edited by Allan Stoekl, translated by Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt, and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 66: "The relations between this painter (identifying himself successively with fragile candles and with sometimes fresh, sometimes faded sunflowers) and an ideal, of which the sun is the most dazzling form, appear to be analogous to those that men maintained at one time with their gods, at least so long as these gods stupefied them; mutilation normally intervened in these relations as sacrifice."



manner that is consistent with the mythic characterization of the artist as a tortured visionary that was widely popular at the time.<sup>49</sup>

It is at this point, where it seems the psychological aspects of the narrative are further disturbing the film's form, that appealing to the common reading of Resnais's film as somehow representing mental interiority might again appear to be reasonable. To be sure, if my proposed alternative to this reading has been rooted in developing an account of Resnais's cinematic framing of the generative tension in what Bazin refers to as a "picturable world" that not only gestures toward the expansive possibilities of what can be revealed but also is, according to Andrew, determined by what lies "beyond the self" – a world that is constituted not only by what it discloses but also by "the nothing" that always already outstrips it – then it is important to note that neither Bazin nor Andrew offer much, if any, engagement with the post-Nuenen portions of the film. Nonetheless, we can further develop an account of Resnais's cinematic world-disclosure while also avoiding the problems resulting from internalist theories of mind that follow from positing the accessibility and representability of subjective interiority by turning to an approach to psychiatric illness that is not predicated on reducing psychology to the study of inner mental states.

While the specificities of Van Gogh's condition, along with whether he actually committed suicide, are still debated, it is widely accepted – corroborated by the artist's personal letters and by descriptions from those close to him – that he suffered from debilitating bouts of depression and anxiety.<sup>50</sup> Drawing from disciplines ranging from neurobiology, clinical studies,

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<sup>49</sup> Antonin Artaud, "Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society," *Antonin Artaud Anthology*, edited by Jack Hirschman, translated by Mary Beach and Lawrence Ferlinghetti (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1965), pp. 135-163; Georges Bataille, "Van Gogh as Prometheus," pp. 58-60; Georges Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," pp. 61-72; Irving Stone, *Lust for Life: The Novel of Vincent Van Gogh* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1937).

<sup>50</sup> Dietrich Blumer, "The Illness of Vincent van Gogh," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 159.4 (April 2002): pp. 519-526; Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Van Gogh: The Life* (New York: Random House, 2011).

philosophy of mind, and phenomenological psychology, Matthew Ratcliffe challenges the distinction normally posited between the psychological and the somatic by appealing to Heidegger's account of moods – as always already disclosing our embodied, diffuse, and pre-intentional “being-in-the-world”<sup>51</sup> – to maintain that existential feelings reveal the world as mattering to us in very specific and different ways.<sup>52</sup> Depression, according to Ratcliffe, is a multi-causal and heterogeneous occurrence of a deep, all-encompassing change in the phenomenological structures of experience that involves disturbances in our existential feelings, namely through revealing the world as profoundly failing to matter.<sup>53</sup> This horizon of impossibility, where being-in-the-world undergoes an intense breakdown and is disclosed as “not-being-at-home” (*Unheimlichkeit*), is central to Heidegger's account of how existential finitude “reveals the nothing,” which not only is a “receding of beings as a whole” but also “discloses these beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> By being-in-the-world, Heidegger is referring to the basic, ontological state in which Dasein addresses itself to the world through a “non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment.” Through the concept of being-in-the-world, Heidegger aims to dismantle the subject-object dichotomy by developing an account of the co-constitutive relationship between Dasein and world. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 91–95, 107. For Heidegger's account of mood as already disclosing “being-in-the-world as a whole,” see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 172–179.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression: A Study in Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 55–58.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression*, pp. 50–55.

<sup>54</sup> On anxiety as a fundamental mood (*Befindlichkeit*), which Macquarrie and Robinson problematically translate as “state-of-mind,” that reveals Dasein's being-in-the-world as “not-being-at-home,” see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 233. On anxiety as revealing the nothing, see Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?,” *Basic Writings*, edited and translated by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 101–103. For a reading of Heidegger's notion of death as a limit-situation that occurs in anxiety, see William Blattner, “The Concept of Death in *Being and Time*,” pp. 63–67. For phenomenological approaches to psychology that appeal to Heidegger's formulation of “not-being-at-home” (*Unheimlichkeit*) in order to deepen our understanding of major depression, see Fredrik Svenaeus, “Das Unheimliche – Towards a Phenomenology of Illness,” *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy* 3 (2000): pp. 3–16; Tamara Kayali and Furhan Iqbal, “Depression as Unhomelike Being-in-the-World? Phenomenology's Challenge to our Understanding of Illness,” *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy* 16 (2013): pp. 31–39.

One of the profound advantages of Ratcliffe's approach to the study of depression is his argument that the phenomenological method can amount to a radical form of empathy. After establishing that "our most fundamental sense of 'the other'...is not a matter of attributing internal mental states" but rather consists primarily of a "non-conceptual feeling," Ratcliffe argues that empathy requires an embodied "openness to phenomenological difference," a difference that is not readily accessible through cognitive simulation, analogy, or inference.<sup>55</sup> This form of empathy resists methods that attempt to exclude phenomenological differences by way of an assumption or desire for one to fully endure or conceptually ascertain what the other is precisely experiencing. Therefore, while a phenomenological approach to depression must affirm the intersubjective constitution of a shared world, it must also acknowledge the existential variability and cultural heterogeneity of being-in-the-world and the limits of accessibility. He writes:

The sense of uncertainty that is so central to our experience of others is not principally a matter of ignorance about the contents of their heads. A person is intrinsically unknowable in her entirety in a way that a rock is not, because a person is never fully inserted into one's own world and points to something beyond it.<sup>56</sup>

Radical empathy is attuned to this tension between what can be made available through the world that is disclosed by the structures of intersubjectivity and what outstrips that world. It is by way of staging this relationship between revealing and concealing that Resnais's film constructs a distinctive cinematic mode of empathy. That is, rather than representing internal mental states or even making a case that such a task is even possible, *Van Gogh* not only

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression*, pp. 210 and 230. To further trouble theories of subjective interiority in film studies, we can also draw parallels between James Conant's discussion of the incoherence of positing the notion of a "subjective shot" with Ratcliffe's critique of accounts of empathy that attempt to individuate experiences – to understand an experience "in isolation from the rest of the person's life." See James Conant, "The World of a Movie," *Making a Difference: Rethinking Humanism and the Humanities*, edited by Niklas Forsberg and Susanne Jansson (Stockholm: Thales, 2009), p. 303, cited in Daniel Morgan, "Where are We?: Camera Movements and the Problem of Point of View," p. 233; Matthew Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression*, p. 244.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression*, p. 247.

discloses and explores a unique world that emerges from the artist's life and paintings but also attends to the phenomenological differences that exceed what can be disclosed by inscribing an existential breakdown into its formal and narrative configuration.

The film maps out the artist's depression as inextricably bound up with how the world is disclosed through the cinematic framing of the paintings, and if the mode of this disclosure is made evident by the film's above-mentioned formal experimentations, it is also made explicit by the voice-over commentator when he states that Van Gogh's time in Provence – where “the sun is scorching” – is marked by a breakdown in basic ontological distinctions: “Beings and things get mixed up in the same bright illusion.” The artist here is “feverish” and “lonely” until, one day, he “suddenly feels that the appearance of things is running away from his grasp.” However, when shortly thereafter the narrator states that, “once in a while, neighbors and friends come to pose for him,” the film notably registers a sense of calm by way of longer takes and immobile frames that offer intimate close-ups of Van Gogh's well-known portraits from this period. Furthermore, the film transitions between these shots of the portraits through patient dissolves – the only sequence in the Provence section that employs this technique, which is most prominent early on while the artist is in Nuenen. In this way, the film orchestrates the tension between the existential disturbance in the narrated being-in-the-world and the distinctive aesthetic possibilities that concurrently emerge.

However, closing in on its final Auvers-sur-Oise section, the veneer of coherence and continuity constructed in the film's preceding three sections in order to establish a protractible sense of space and movement is almost entirely replaced by hurried juxtapositions of restricted figural contiguity across a number of Van Gogh's late masterpieces. The cinematic frame no longer inquisitively charts out the expansive possibilities of “picturable worlds” within and

between the paintings. There are no more apparent reverse shots that seem to hint at a world beyond the frame or tracking shots that glide through a semblance of a vast, continuous horizon. Rather, the persistent close-ups of specific details – most prominently of suns, sunflowers, and trees and fields, all of which are marked by the same thick texture of brush strokes that appear to blur the borders between things so as to make it seem, as Georges Bataille suggests, that the world is “exploding, inflamed” – substitutes curious exploration with haunting repetition. Following the mythic depiction of the artist as tortured genius, the film associates the worsening conditions that underlie Van Gogh’s looming suicide as inseparable from his late brilliant works that aesthetically gesture not to an infinitely extendable world but a world gradually becoming a horizon of impossibilities.

As the narrator addresses Van Gogh’s suicide, the film once again slows its rhythm and employs dissolves to transition between selected paintings of wheat fields, about which the artist wrote as exhibiting the natural conflict between spiritual restoration and destruction.<sup>57</sup> The film’s final image is of the 1980 piece “Wheatfields Under Thunderclouds,” yet along the right side of the frame, Resnais has inserted a shadowy darkness that, as the shot tracks to the right, appears to consume the landscape. Lasting over twenty seconds, this is the longest take in the film, and the shot continues to patiently track to the right in a way that is reminiscent of the mobile camera in the film’s earlier sections, until the darkness stretches out over the entire frame. Rather than using the more familiar technique of fading or cutting to black, the shot moves into the black – is steadily engulfed by it – and, thus, the film ends with its most explicit demonstration of the strife between world and earth, between revelation and finitude.

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<sup>57</sup> Naomi Margolis Maurer, *The Pursuit of Spiritual Wisdom: The Thought and Art of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin* (London: Associated University Press, 1998), p. 57.

## V. Conclusion

Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" articulates a criticism of and provides an alternative to the sort of subjectivism that not only, as he sees it, dominates modern metaphysics and philosophical aesthetics but also underlies those interpretive attempts to posit an investment in psychological interiority as a distinctive feature of Resnais's modernist cinema. By contrast to the common reading of *Van Gogh* that places emphasis on Resnais's interest in delving into or externalizing the artist's subjective interiority, Heidegger's account of the working of art lends a more conceptually robust expansion of Bazin's remarks on the film's world-disclosive capacities. Additionally, the interpretation of Resnais's film as investigating Van Gogh's inner subjectivity shares common methodical commitments exhibited in Schapiro's polemic against the attribution errors characterizing Heidegger's appropriation of Van Gogh. However, neither Resnais nor Heidegger are seeking to maintain fidelity to artist intentionality. Hence, in regards to his engagement with the painting of shoes, Heidegger's aim is one that is shared and perhaps even articulated more clearly by Resnais's film. In each case, the tension and interplay between the horizons of possibility and the limits to those horizons serve as a generative aesthetic foundation and, in the case of Resnais, as an ethical commitment to a distinctive mode of cinematic empathy that will be further explored in later chapters.

Lastly, I would like to briefly touch on one other famous interpretation of Van Gogh's painting of shoes. In his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson turns to the Van Gogh painting in order to delineate what distinguishes it as an exemplary work of high modernism (in contrast to the postmodern aesthetics of Andy Warhol's piece *Diamond Dust Shoes*). For Jameson, "the willed and violent transformation of a drab peasant object world into the most glorious materialization of pure color in oil paint is to be seen

as a Utopian gesture,” a compensatory act – in the era of commodification and mass production – that bears out its own aesthetic autonomy through a reorganization of perceptual experience, “a whole new Utopian realm of the senses.”<sup>58</sup> Yet, as Rosalind Krauss points out, Jameson acknowledges what she calls a distinctive “paradox...of modernist art’s relation to capital” when he continues by stating that the resulting affective form of perceptual fragmentation “replicates the specializations and divisions of capitalist life at the same time that it seeks in precisely such fragmentation a desperate Utopian compensation for them.”<sup>59</sup> According to Krauss, the modernist artist’s desire to create aesthetic alternatives to industrialization and reification, which is underwritten by the Utopian aim of “cultural reprogramming,” nonetheless produces “another version, although possibly more ideated or rarified, of the very thing against which he or she was reacting.”<sup>60</sup> As has been demonstrated above, Resnais’s decision to present the artist’s paintings in black and white, which already complicates the “hallucinatory” effect that Jameson reads into Van Gogh’s use of color, contributes to the film’s concern with a different kind of tension that pertains less to a utopian compensation or an unwitting projection of a progressive stage of capital than to an aesthetics of foreclosure. However, Resnais’s cinematic intervention on the paradox of modernist art – involving, on the one hand, the transformative and autonomous capacities of art and, on the other, its perpetuation of technological reification – will be taken up in the next chapter.

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<sup>58</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,” *October* 54 (Autumn 1990): p. 11; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,” p. 11.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CINEMATIC MODERNISM IN THE AGE OF THE WORLD PICTURE

#### I. Introduction

There are two important reasons, which are couched as two distinct methods of interpretation, why Frederic Jameson, in his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, chooses Van Gogh's painting of a pair of shoes as an archetypal work of high modernism positioned in contrast to the ahistorical and affective flatness of postmodernist aesthetics, here exemplified by Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*. First, Van Gogh's distinguishing style – such as his use of “hallucinatory” colors and “garish” hues and his visual construction of a “grotesque typology” of agricultural life and labor – constitutes a “Utopian gesture,” one that sets up an “semiautonomous space” staked on the promise of a radical reorganization of the senses. Yet, according to Jameson, the form of this conviction in the possibility of aesthetic transformation nonetheless “replicates the specializations and divisions of capitalist life at the same time that it seeks in precisely such fragmentation a desperate Utopian compensation for them.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the painting demonstrates that an important feature of modernist art's claim to perceptual transformation and aesthetic autonomy is this intrinsic paradox that stems from an inevitable perpetuation of the very processes of reification that it seeks to resist. It is precisely this political paradox, along with the manifold ways of responding to it, that Jameson will later refer to as modernism's “aesthetics of failure.”<sup>2</sup> Second, Jameson shifts to Heidegger's engagement with Van Gogh – which, as discussed in the previous chapter, centers on the crucial

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>2</sup> Frederic Jameson, “The Poetics of Totality,” *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 3-5.



interplay between world and earth that, for Heidegger, distinguishes the work of art's mode of disclosure – in order to draw out how the painting stages “the process whereby these henceforth illustrious peasant shoes slowly recreate about themselves the whole missing object-world which was once their lived context.” This kind of hermeneutic depth that invites, or even demands, such existential contextualization is yet another feature of aesthetic modernism. It is important to note that these two methods of reading are staked on two influential paradigms of interpretation that Jameson continually associates with modernism: the political paradox emerging from the problems surrounding autonomy and reification stems from a Marxist perspective, and the hermeneutic depth that gives rise to an artwork's setting up of a world is shaped by a phenomenological one. This chapter will bridge these two conceptual approaches by demonstrating that Heidegger's philosophical project is not only acutely attentive to the tension between art and technological reification but also adds unique insights into the generative possibility that stems from its irreconcilability. That is, it will be shown that what Jameson formulates as the political paradox of aesthetic modernism generates a distinctive ethos precisely by way of – and not in contradistinction to – Heidegger's hermeneutic strategies, which I will argue is developed out of an ontology of finitude.

It is in explicitly exploring the generative possibilities of the tension between art and reification that Resnais's cinema intervenes in important ways on discourses surrounding aesthetic modernism, especially with respect to how Jameson's insights into the political paradox of modernist art intersects with film theory's long-standing conversation with ideological critique. This conversation has a rich and varied history that includes the Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s, the Chinese progressive film movement of the 1930s, the pro-Resistance commitments of Italian Neorealist cinema, the thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School, and

the more recent theories of ideologically constructed subject-positions – discursively operating under the umbrella of what David Rodowick, following Sylvia Harvey, dubs “political modernism” – that have remained pervasive in studies of identity politics, postcolonialism, oppositional cinemas, and the political economy of film production and consumption. This chapter, however, will focus only on Theodor Adorno’s theory of art and will do so for three reasons. First, while Adorno’s acerbic criticisms of Heidegger and his explicit rejection of any conceptual affinity undoubtedly highlight their deep philosophical differences, both thinkers not only share common concerns over “the predicaments engendered by the sway of modern science and technology,”<sup>3</sup> but they also make influentially insightful and mutually resonant appeals to art as asserting a potentially transformative challenge to late modernity by way of, and not despite, the paradox that emerges from its inevitable perpetuation of the metaphysical and social conditions it seeks to critique. Second, Adorno’s contemporaneity with both Heidegger and Resnais will help establish a broader scope for, and emphasize the political stakes of, how the tension between art and technology is articulated in postwar European philosophy and aesthetics. Lastly, Adorno makes significant contributions to the critical genealogy of modernist aesthetics through his considerations of postwar poetry – both the ethical question of its possibility and the aesthetic forms that such questioning takes.

By examining how Resnais’s documentaries of the 1950s – with particular emphasis on *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*) – approach issues of cultural violence and systematic dehumanization, I will argue that these films develop Adorno’s question regarding the very possibility of art in the face of enormous suffering by grappling not only with historical trauma but also with the technological apparatus that makes such historical recognition possible. What

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<sup>3</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), p. 47.

will emerge is an account of how Resnais's cinema engages with the tension between reification and freedom through a critically reflexive acknowledgement of finitude, and I will argue that the different ways in which this finitude is configured into the form of his films constitute their distinctively ethical response.

## II. The Danger and the Saving Power

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger argues that the mode of disclosure distinctive to the work of art – its manifestation of the world-earth strife – serves as an alternative to the modern epoch's subjectivism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship between world as the referential nexus of intelligibility and earth as its necessary but contingent form of finitude is characterized by inextricability, irresolvability, and generative possibility. Heidegger's conviction in art's irreducibility to Western metaphysical systems of thought, along with their resulting manifestation in modern sociopolitical constructions of subjectivity, has had a lasting influence on critical aesthetics. It finds, for example, a poignant expression in Caroline A. Jones's contribution to a recent round-table questionnaire in *October* on the topic of new approaches to materialisms. After noting that, for Heidegger, "the work of art exists not to 'represent' a world, but *to bring one into being*," Jones proposes that the work set out for art in the age of the Anthropocene is to mobilize the "mysteries of perception" in order to bring about worlds into being that resist the totalizing grip of the "world-picture" and instead might polymorphically and agonistically "evolve us up, helping us to become properly sensitive to the whole blooming, buzzing assemblage of intersecting worlds."<sup>4</sup> Yet, taking cue from Jameson's reading of aesthetic modernism, how do we reconcile Heidegger's claims

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<sup>4</sup> Caroline A. Jones, "A Questionnaire on Materialisms," *October* 155 (2016): p. 63.

regarding the resistant and transformative capacities of art with his broader historical indictment of the modern epoch? In other words, can the artwork ever truly transcend the technological conditions of reductive standardization that make possible the consumption and production of “the whole blooming, buzzing assemblage of intersecting worlds”?

One of the most challenging tensions debated by interpreters of Heidegger’s later writings is perhaps best conveyed in his oft-repeated reference to Hölderlin’s line from the 1802 hymn “Patmos”: “where the danger is / there grows the saving power.”<sup>5</sup> The 1954 article “The Question Concerning Technology,” which was based on a part of his first public lecture series after the war in 1949, describes the danger characteristic of modern technology as “enframing” (*Ge-stell*).<sup>6</sup> For Heidegger, enframing is the modern epoch’s mode of revealing and is defined as the orderability of everything that we encounter into a “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*): the processes and mechanisms of reducing the world according to calculated standards of efficient and effective manipulability.<sup>7</sup> Thus, through the “challenging-forth” of enframing, nature has

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” p. 34. See also Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos,” *Hymns and Fragments*, translated by Richard Sieburth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> William Lovitt’s now widely used translation of *Ge-stell* to “enframing” is not without controversy as it runs the risk of suggesting some physical force with external borders – a form that contains content. To be sure, Heidegger himself claims that *Ge-stell* is neither like a “bookcase” or a “water well,” nor is it “something constant in the ordered standing reserve”; rather, it “names the universal ordering, gathered of itself, of the complete orderability of what presences as a whole.” See Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 31; Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, translated by Andrew J. Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). For Andrew Mitchell’s argument for replacing “enframing” with the term “positionality,” see his translator’s foreword in Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. xi; for a defense of Lovitt’s translation, see Babette Babich, “Constellating Technology: Heidegger’s *Die Gefahr/The Danger*,” *The Multidimensionality of Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, edited by Babette Babich and Dimitri Ginev (Netherlands: Springer International Publishing, 2014), pp. 153-182. I will take up Lovitt’s translation of the term, not only because of its recognizability and its rhetorical versatility as an active gerund, infinitive verb, and a base verb, but also because what is at issue in the present chapter is the conceptual, historical, and aesthetic implications of precisely its ontologically totalizing characterization.

<sup>7</sup> While the specifications of Heidegger’s epochal delineation of the history of Western thought varies across his writings, some of its most important features that remain consistent are as follows: Heidegger’s formulation of the epoch is a revision of Husserl’s epoché in that where the latter is concerned with bracketing or suspending presuppositional judgments, the former disavows such critical agency on the part of the phenomenological subject and instead configures the bracketing as a historical withholding or forgetting that nonetheless constitutes a realm of possible interpretations of the meaning of being; while Heidegger makes general claims that, for instance, the ancient epoch understood being in terms of *physis*, the medieval epoch anchored it in theological terms of the Hellenic-Christian God through Scholasticism and mysticism, and the modern epoch anthropocentrically reduces all

become a resource for scientific inquiry, industrial production, and aesthetic pleasure, while humans have come to be not only defined by their relation to this network of labor and consumption and thereby themselves reduced to the standing reserve but also deluded by the anthropocentric presupposition of their subjectivist authority.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that Heidegger's argument is staked on a thoroughly ontological premise, and what enframes and is enframed in the modern technological epoch is not this or that combination of devices and users but, rather, a historically contingent yet determinative horizon of revelation and possibility. Thus, when Heidegger states that "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological," he is maintaining that what renders everything into the standing reserve is not reducible to any given instrument or activity; instead, it is an "ordering revealing" that constitutively shapes all that comes into presence.<sup>9</sup>

So where does the "saving power" come from? In opposition to the danger of enframing, Heidegger posits the "bringing-forth" of *poiēsis* – an alternative mode of revealing that he locates in works of art as bearing the possibility of bringing "the saving power into its first

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beings to "standing-reserve," he maintains that an epoch is not to be mistaken for a discrete measurement of time and instead should be understood as possibly overlapping modes of predominant interpretations of being; yet, there is a sense of succession in that Heidegger's epochal history charts a decline characterized by a deepening substitution of the tension between presence and absence for a metaphysics of presence that was inaugurated by the ancient Greeks and finds its fullest manifestation in the modern epoch; and although Heidegger's deep investment in the Greeks (especially the pre-Socratics) is underwritten by his commitment to excavating the structural form of the generative tension between revealing and concealing, this epochal history is a history of oblivion and thus is not a naïve or nostalgic call for a return to earlier ways of understanding being. See Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), pp. 9, 52, 55-59; Martin Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, translated by Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 191-194; Martin Heidegger, "Anaximander's Saying," *Off the Beaten Track*, edited and translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 153-155; Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," pp. 115-136; Martin Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics," *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, translated by W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), pp. 281-288; Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, translated by Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 91. See also Mark B. Okrent, "The Truth of Being and the History of Philosophy," *The Monist* 64.4 (1981): pp. 500-517; Iain Thomson, "Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger's *Destruction of Metaphysics*," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8.3 (2000): pp. 297-327.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," pp. 14-16 and 27.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," pp. 4 and 22.

shining forth.” Tracing the etymological and conceptual genealogy that technology and *poiēsis* share in the ancient Greek concept of *technē*, Heidegger ultimately claims that art is, “on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.” It is precisely the thinking through of this difference that the question concerning technology leads.<sup>10</sup>

However, there is a problem here. If the essence of technology is not the technological but is instead bound up with an ontological mode of bringing the meaning of beings into presence, then it would appear, as Andrew Feenberg has pointed out, that an irresolvable tension emerges when the ontical – whether presented in the form of any given artwork, process, or cultural event – is declared as a viable means for resistance. That is, to posit site-specific modes of revelation that subvert the danger associated with enframing assumes that the ontological maintains a mutability that is contingent upon different constellations of practices, but Heidegger’s epochal account of history constrains the variable applicability and willing manifestation of such radical ontological reconfiguration. Therefore, Feenberg’s critique of Heidegger centers on the epiphenomenal position that the ontic comes to occupy in its relation to the ontological: “Ontic political struggles over the design of devices cannot change the ontological dispensation within which the world appears as technological. Or, again in my rough translation, one can’t change the fundamental background assumptions of a culture by enacting them in this or that particular situation.”<sup>11</sup> By drawing out the incompatibility of the political efficacy of any given particular with the totalizing characterization of enframing, Feenberg is targeting an important strand in Heidegger scholarship that has attempted to vindicate art, along with other marginal, alternative, or obsolescent cultural practices, as resisting the technological

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” pp. 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Feenberg, “The Ontic and the Ontological in Heidegger’s Philosophy of Technology,” pp. 445-450. For a similar critique of Heidegger’s disavowal of technological particulars, see Don Ihde, *Heidegger’s Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives*, pp. 114-127.

paradigm and even prompting cultural transformation.<sup>12</sup> In a later article co-written with Dana Belu, Feenberg pushes these objections further by asserting that Heidegger's ontology of technology is an aporetic one and that any attempt to reinscribe political agency within the restrictions of his theory is predicated on an inconsistent and untenable wavering between total or partial formulations of enframing.<sup>13</sup> Thus, there remains an aporia between, on the one hand, the ontological scope of the claims that underwrite Heidegger's understanding of technology and, on the other, the ontical particularity on which Heidegger's account of art – and his own ambitious aims for contributing to an overcoming of metaphysical thinking – depends.

While I will later offer a competing interpretation that challenges the bases of Feenberg's critique, I want to pivot here and draw out the wider political stakes of this aporetic tension between enframing and artworks. It is, after all, in his 1949 Bremen lectures that Heidegger locates one of the most profound consequences of enframing in the “gas chambers and extermination camps” of the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> And this might make us look to the place where the historical urgency of the possibility of art as saving power is perhaps nowhere more critically and famously stated: Adorno's dictum – also written in 1949 – regarding the barbarity of writing

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<sup>12</sup> The two prominent scholars that bear the brunt of this criticism are Hubert Dreyfus and Iain Thomson. See Hubert Dreyfus, “Heidegger on the Connection Between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 289-316; Hubert Dreyfus, “Heidegger on Gaining a Free Relation to Technology,” *Technology and the Politics of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 97-107; Iain Thomson, “What's Wrong with Being a Technological Essentialist? A Response to Feenberg,” *Inquiry* 43 (2000): pp. 429-444; Iain Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 44-77.

<sup>13</sup> Dana S. Belu and Andrew Feenberg, “Heidegger's Aporetic Ontology of Technology,” pp. 1-19.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, pp. 26-27. The text reads: “Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs.” For readings of this passage and accounts of the controversy surrounding it and its subsequent removal from the 1953 publication of the lecture as “The Question Concerning Technology,” see Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), pp. 79-141; Mahon O'Brien, *Heidegger, History, and the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 23-41; and Albert Borgmann, “Technology,” *A Companion to Heidegger*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 420-432.

poetry after Auschwitz.<sup>15</sup> While much has been written about the long discursive history of the use and misuse of Adorno's phrase, the focus here will be on its points of contact with cinema.<sup>16</sup>

### III. The Double Character of Art

While film is an artistic medium that opens up possibilities for bringing-forth aesthetic worlds, it remains a representational apparatus whose material condition of possibility is dependent on specific processes that instantiate what Heidegger refers to as the dangers of technological enframing. That is, intrinsic to cinema are both the possibility of poetic, transformative revelation and an ongoing perpetuation of modernity's persistent drive to conceptually render the world as picture.<sup>17</sup> This aporetic impasse finds a particularly important articulation in the complex interweaving of the aesthetic and socioeconomic features of cinema that is at issue in the frequently cited exchange between Adorno and Walter Benjamin concerning the latter's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

Adorno identifies two central aspects of the essay that he claims need greater dialectical complication: its polemical treatment of autonomous art and its advocating of the politically progressive capacity of technologically reproduced art, namely film.<sup>18</sup> With respect to the latter, Adorno charges Benjamin's redemptive reading of cinema with "out-and-out romanticism," and

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<sup>15</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> For an insightful reading of the controversy surround this statement's different iterations and transformations throughout Adorno's late writings, see Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 25-58.

<sup>17</sup> In Heidegger's "On a Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer," the Japanese thinker – in what amounts to the only explicit reference to a film in Heidegger's texts – says the following about Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* (1950): "Regardless of what the aesthetic quality of a Japanese film may turn out to be, the mere fact that our world is set forth in the frame of a film forces that world into the sphere of what you call objectness." Martin Heidegger, "On a Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer," pp. 16-17

<sup>18</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin," *Aesthetics and Politics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 120-126.



in response, Benjamin admits that he “tried to articulate positive moments as clearly as [Adorno] managed to articulate negative ones.”<sup>19</sup> Consistent with a reductive reading of this positive-negative distinction, the conventional interpretation of this exchange pits Benjamin’s optimism about the cinematic medium’s revolutionarily democratizing potential against Adorno’s elitist pessimism about film’s “infantile mimetism,” which serves to technologically and aesthetically reify the homogenizing structures of commodity fetishism.<sup>20</sup> Although Adorno indeed identifies film as “the central sector of the culture industry,”<sup>21</sup> elsewhere in a text co-authored with the composer Hanns Eisler, we find a more nuanced position:

Technology opens up unlimited opportunities for art in the future, and even in the poorest motion pictures there are moments when such opportunities are strikingly apparent. But the same principle that has opened up these opportunities also ties them to big business. A discussion of industrialized culture must show the interaction of these two factors.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Adorno’s treatment of film points to a deeper ambivalence.

On the one hand, Adorno’s work presents an often-totalizing picture of how particulars are thoroughly subsumed or negated by the standardizing and integrating functions of late capitalism’s logic of instrumentalism.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, he maintains that art “epitomizes the

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<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Letters to Walter Benjamin,” p. 123; Walter Benjamin, “Reply,” *Aesthetics and Politics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Ronald Taylor (London: Verso, 1980), p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> See Diane Waldman, “Critical Theory and Film: Adorno and ‘The Culture Industry’ Revisited,” *New German Critique* 12 (Autumn 1977): pp. 39-60; Thomas Andrae, “Adorno on Film and Mass Culture: The Culture Industry Reconsidered,” *Jump Cut* 20 (1979): pp. 34-37; Richard W. Allen, “The Aesthetic Experience of Modernity: Benjamin, Adorno, and Contemporary Film Theory,” *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987): pp. 225-240; Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), pp. 186-187; and for a more nuanced treatment, see Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 163-212.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” translated by Anson G. Rabinbach, *New German Critique* 6 (Autumn 1975): 14.

<sup>22</sup> Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. liii; cited in Miriam B. Hansen, “Introduction to Adorno, ‘Transparencies on Film’ (1966)” *New German Critique* 24/25 (Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982): p. 186. For a thorough reading of how Adorno’s later writings on cinema pivot on the ways film can negotiate the historically and dialectically mediated relationship between artistic technique (*Technik*) and industrial technology (*Technologie*), see Miriam B. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 207-250.

<sup>23</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, translated by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 206: “Immediacy, the popular community concocted by films, amounts to mediation without residue,

unsubsumable and, as such, challenges the prevailing principle of reality: that of exchangeability.”<sup>24</sup> The relationship between these two, however, is not rigidly dichotomous but rather dialectical. That is, according to Adorno, art has a “double character” – it is autonomous and yet remains a social fact (*fait social*) – which “is expressed ever and again in the palpable dependencies and conflicts between the two spheres.”<sup>25</sup> If the emergence of modern art is historically rooted in the conditions that gave rise to art’s autonomy from religious or political patronage at the same time of its increasing commodification in capitalist markets, what distinguishes “radical” modernism, for Adorno, is an aesthetic self-consciousness regarding the resulting antinomy, one manifestation of which is guilt not only over the inescapable fetishism built into any cultural attempt at undermining false consciousness but also over art’s relationship to suffering:<sup>26</sup>

The artwork is not only the echo of suffering, it diminishes it; form, the organon of its seriousness, is at the same time the organon of the neutralization of suffering. Art thereby falls into an unsolvable aporia. The demand for complete responsibility on the part of artworks increases the burden of their guilt.<sup>27</sup>

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reducing men and everything human so perfectly to things, that their contrast to things, indeed the spell of reification itself, becomes imperceptible...The total interconnectedness of the culture industry, omitting nothing, is one with total social delusion.” For an account of how “the whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry” and the political and aesthetic consequences of the “false identity of universal and particular” that results from the affective apparatus of mass consumption, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectical Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94-136.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited and translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 83. What is stake for Adorno’s insistence on the autonomous aspect of art – or, to invoke the terms of his debate with Benjamin, its “aura” – are insightfully drawn out by Robert Kaufman, “Aura, Still,” *October* 99 (Winter 2002): p. 49: “What the intentional abandonment of aura then produces is not the critical objectivation of the reifying process, the bringing to light of the erasure of labor and the commodification of everyone and everything; what results instead is culture’s straightforward, affirmational repetition of a consequently unchallenged reification.”

<sup>25</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 5, 229. See also, Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” p. 32: “A successful work, according to immanent criticism, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure.”

<sup>26</sup> For an illuminating discussion of Adorno’s account of guilt and fetishism in terms of art’s double character, see J.M. Bernstein, “The Dead Speaking of Stones and Stars: Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*,” *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, edited by Fred Rush (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 139-164. See also James M. Harding, “Historical Dialectics and the Autonomy of Art in Adorno’s *Ästhetische Theorie*,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 50.3 (Summer 1992): pp. 183-195.

<sup>27</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 39. For an explication of the relation between this “unsolvable aporia” and guilt, see Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), p.

This burden of guilt becomes especially pronounced when considering the work of art in the wake of the Second World War, and in one of the texts in which Adorno states that “to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,”<sup>28</sup> he further sheds light on the ethical and affective stakes of the aporia of art:

By turning suffering into images, despite all their hard implacability, they wound our shame before the victims. For these are used to create something, works of art, that are thrown to the consumption of a world which destroyed them. The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite.<sup>29</sup>

Despite any aspirations it may have of creative autonomy, not only does the indexical nature of aesthetic documentation absorb historical suffering into our broader nexus of instrumental rationalization, but it also potentially gives rise to an ethically problematic form of pleasure – precisely because it fits into established modernist models and genres. Modernist art, according to Adorno, contends with this aporia not in order to surmount it but, rather, to make it more explicit by implicating its own processes of production and the modes of reception it engenders.

One example of such aesthetic modernism is found in the work of Paul Celan. Adorno writes, “His poetry is permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation. Celan’s poems want to speak of the most extreme horror through silence.”<sup>30</sup> This is an aporetic desire, in which to speak of horror through silence – by way of

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130: “This culpability irreparably associated with all artistic activity is, then, the deeper motivate for the radical separation, in Adorno, between Art in general and the individual works: for what these last do, what they ‘work on’ in the artistic process, is to engage the universal sense of guilt, to address it with lacerating acuity, to bring it to consciousness in the form an unresolvable contradiction.”

<sup>28</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” p. 34; see also Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” translated by Francis McDonagh, *New Left Review* 87-88 (September-December 1974): 84.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 322. For a discussion of how this aporetic aesthetics can be placed in the context of Adorno’s critical engagement with Benjamin, see Robert Kaufman, “Aura, Still,” p. 51: “Preserving Benjamin’s insights about how Baudelaire brilliantly makes lyric vocation confront the ostensible destruction of its own historical precondition – the kind of temporal-reflective experience apparently no longer possible, Baudelaire’s

which “truth content itself becomes negative” – is aesthetically manifest through a reflexive decomposition or deformation of language: “Celan transposes into linguistic processes the increasing abstraction of landscape, progressively approximating it to the inorganic.”<sup>31</sup>

Abstraction, inorganicity, and deformation, as the aesthetic principles through which silence attempts to be spoken, are exhibited in Celan’s 1958 poem “Engführung.”<sup>32</sup> Literally meaning to be guided (*Führung*) into a narrow (*Eng*) area, *Engführung* is also the German word for the final part of a fugue, the stretto, which builds contrapuntally toward an intense climax. With both senses of the term in mind, Peter Szondi claims that the poem is a “terrain of death and sorrow,” marked by a progression that “takes place along a path which leads in strict and narrow fashion through memory of the death camps.”<sup>33</sup>

This is again the aporia. What gives shape to Celan’s desire for mapping out a poetic site of legible mourning also disrupts any spatial or conceptual stabilization for what this remembrance might look like or where it might take place. For example, drawing attention to the asterisks that Celan inserts between each of his nine stanzas, Aris Fioretos notes their lack of “semantic ambition” in general grammatical usage – “alphabetically speaking, they are nothing” and “cannot be uttered in any form other than the refusal to utter, in silence” – and interprets their role in the poem as demonstrating “the possible impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz”: “The asterisks...resist hermeneutic appropriation, since they mark the taking place of language without language.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, after initially inviting the reader toward “the terrain / with the

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poems seems to declare, in a radically commodified, high-speed, high-capitalist modernity – Adorno nonetheless effectively defends a lyric that begins by singing song’s impossibility.”

<sup>31</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 322.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Celan, “Engführung,” *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, translated by John Felstiner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), pp. 118-131.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Szondi, “Reading “Engführung”: An Essay on the Poetry of Paul Celan, translated by D. Caldwell and S. Esh, *boundary 2* 11.3 (Spring 1983): pp. 233, 263.

<sup>34</sup> Aris Fioretos, “Nothing: Reading Paul Celan’s “Engführung,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 27.2 (1990): pp. 164, 165.

unmistakable trace,” the poem develops toward greater dissolution on the semantic level as phenomenal qualities like colors and physical properties like shapes are detached from any objects or spaces.<sup>35</sup> Thus, through what Adorno calls its double character, Celan’s lyrical expression of the ethical and political exigencies of memory – its historical and unmistakable trace – is partially constituted by its own negation, perpetually haunted by its own impossibility.

#### IV. *Night and Fog* and the Question Concerning Cinema

It is a curious but non-trivial fact of history that Celan’s “Engführung” was shaped to an important extent by his experience translating into German Jean Cayrol’s original French commentary to Alain Resnais’s documentary on the Holocaust, *Night and Fog*. In a remarkably detailed comparative analysis, Eric Kligerman identifies key similarities between Celan’s 1956 translation of the film’s commentary and his 1958 poem – not only semantically with the frequent use of distinctive words, neologisms, and themes but also syntactically with the recurrence of colons, caesuras, ellipses, line breaks that fracture words, and enjambments. In doing so, Kligerman draws out Celan’s radical abstraction, which aims to counter the representationalism that motivates the conventional expressions or repressions of traumatic memory in order to recuperate a trace of the “Holocaustal uncanny” along with that of the Other who it left annihilated, effaced, traumatized.<sup>36</sup>

In regards to *Night and Fog*, however, Kligerman maintains that despite Resnais’s own cinematic adoption of an “optics of Cubism” that attempts to fragment and reconstitute the landscape of historical trauma, the film nonetheless “becomes complicit in what it critiques” by

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Celan, “Engführung,” p. 119, 127-129.

<sup>36</sup> Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny: Paul Celan, Specularity and the Visual Arts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 138-186.

subjecting the Other to erasure. This, according to Kligerman, results from the film's dependence on the image in a way that deprives the word of its crucial role in lending specificity to the Jewish Other:

[Resnais's] turning to iconic images of the Judeocide – the Warsaw Ghetto child with raised arms, France's station for Jewish deportation, the myriad yellow stars – and the use of places associated predominantly with Jewish victims would corroborate the idea that Resnais's intention is actually to unmask the identity of these particular victims. But without a linguistic act that articulates such uniqueness, there is instead an implosion of identification.<sup>37</sup>

Such an argument is predicated on two key assumptions: first, that the uniqueness of identity must privilege a linguistic act for its articulation, and, second, that “an implosion of identification” entails erasure. While the former rests on a conceptually unsubstantiated premise about the epistemological distinction between photographic and linguistic representation and each medium's relationship to the particular and the general, the latter assumption draws on the prevalent trend of interpreting Resnais's cinema – along with broader notions of narrative, identification, and empathy – that was disputed in the previous chapter.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Kligerman's brief discussion of Resnais's *Van Gogh* appeals to internalist theories of cinema's relation to the mind by stating that the filmmaker probes “the interior spaces of the painter's consciousness,” but of more pressing concern here is his specific formulation of identification.<sup>39</sup>

The previous chapter demonstrated that, even in Resnais's earliest documentaries, conventional forms of narrative identification that ascribe primacy to reductive and conceptually tenuous accounts of subjectivity were disavowed for an alternative mode of world-disclosure – namely, one that aesthetically stages the tension between revealing and concealing. The

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<sup>37</sup> Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny*, p. 143, 148.

<sup>38</sup> For an earlier provocative critique of the film's failure to explicitly acknowledge the “particularity of the Jewish Holocaust” that avoids the presuppositions at issue in Kligerman's case, see Robert Michael, “A Second Look: *Night and Fog*,” *Cineaste* 13.4 (1984): pp. 36-37.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny*, p. 155.

aesthetic insights afforded by *Van Gogh* rested not in some sort of imagining of the painter's mental processes but, rather, in its reflexive mapping out of a cinematic world whose finitude is determinative of what is, and can never be, made accessible through either the frames of the film or the frames of the paintings. By appealing to Matthew Ratcliffe's recent studies in the phenomenology of depression, I argued that the radical form of Resnais's cinematic empathy emerges precisely from this tension between affirming the intersubjective constitution of a meaningful world and acknowledging the intrinsic inaccessibility of the Other.

The stakes of experimenting with an alternative aesthetics of empathy are, of course, much higher in *Night and Fog* than in *Van Gogh*, but this is equally true for the stakes of rejecting conventional forms of cinematic identification, which were carefully and innovatively employed to exploit their most powerful effects in Leni Riefenstahl's 1934 celebration of the National Socialist Workers' Party Congress, *Triumph of the Will*.<sup>40</sup> This much is made clear in the earliest sequences of *Night and Fog*. After opening with vibrantly colorful footage of a serene landscape, from and through which the cranes and tracks of the camera guide us into present-day Auschwitz-Birkenau, the film abruptly makes the first of many of its archival flashbacks, which in this instance intercuts newsreel footage of Nazi mobilization with excerpts from Riefenstahl's film. The formal strategies used in this transition from the present to the past – the unnaturally brightened and clean images achieved by way of Eastmancolor are replaced by the grainy black-and-white footage from the archive, there are disruptions in movement patterns not only at the level of the frame itself from mobile to static but also at the level within the

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<sup>40</sup> For an account of how cinematic devices of narrative identification are utilized in Riefenstahl's film to construct a coherent sense of national identity that remains consistent with sociopolitical modes of identification exploited by fascist state power, see Frank P. Tomasulo, "The Mass Psychology of Fascist Cinema: Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*," *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, edited by Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), pp. 81-102.

frames from steady and fluent tracks and cranes through deserted sites to the intensely urgent and pulsing movements of German soldiers marching in the opposite screen direction, and Eisler's soft melodious score in the opening gives way to the use of harsh pizzicato accompanied by high pitches and snares – amount to what Joshua Hirsch calls a “total reversal,” in which “the past intrudes violently on the present.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the violence of this reversal is performed on and through the history of cinema in Resnais's citation of *Triumph of the Will* at a decisive moment in his film.

After the last title card of Riefenstahl's credit sequence reads, “Adolf Hitler flew once again to Nuremberg to hold a military display,” the opening image is a perspectival shot from within the cockpit of a flying plane that pans screen left as it absorbs the view of the surrounding clouds. As a result, the very first shot of *Triumph of the Will* establishes its aims of exploiting the narrative logic that defines empathic identification with the imaginary formation of subjectivity by aligning the initial image with the perspective of the Führer as he soars through the heavens and descends on the eagerly awaiting masses. The film goes on to preserve this visual paradigm by using continuity editing between the perspectives of Hitler, his civilian supporters, and his military, resulting in a cinematic formation of the Third Reich's imagined community. Thus, the aggressive formal disturbances through which *Night and Fog* first turns to the past – along with the strategic citation of *Triumph of the Will* – announces its marked deviation from the tropes of Classical Hollywood cinema that was so easily and effectively appropriated into a fascist aesthetics. In this context, Kligerman's charge that there is “an

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<sup>41</sup> Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p. 50. See also Andrew Hebard, “Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*,” *New German Critique* 71 (Spring-Summer 1997): pp. 87-113. According to Hebard, the film begins by creating a sharp contrast between the past and the present but unfolds along a trajectory that increasingly blurs this temporal distinction in a way that displays how the past “infects” or “contaminates” the present: for example, the eventual use of monochromatic shades for present footage, the increasing continuity of the musical score across jumps between the present and the past, and the reversal of the movement-stasis dyad.



implosion of identification” in *Night and Fog* is rather a significant part of the film’s ethical response.

Moreover, claiming that such an implosion results in the film’s erasure of the specificity of Jewish suffering exclusively defines empathy according to a theory of identification that privileges the production of linguistically articulated subject positions and, thereby, fails to imagine alternative forms of empathy. Indeed, in the wider context of the debates surrounding the conceptual determinateness of recognition, ranging from the epistemology of other minds to the politics of difference, two interrelated consequences arise from Kligerman’s restricted definition of identification. First, it renders recognition as a primarily cognitive-linguistic act that reduces the Other into its object, and second, it assumes an epistemic authority attributable to the cinematic or poetic apparatus that grants such recognition. According to Patchen Markell, seeking and granting this kind of recognition is constituted by the very social relations of subordination that it tries to challenge.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, Markell proposes what he refers to as a “politics of acknowledgement.” Drawing on the significant role occupied by finitude in Stanley Cavell’s distinctive formulation of acknowledgement – as being irreducible to a “feat of cognition” and as calling for a “recognition of the other’s specific relation to oneself” that “entails the revelation of oneself as having denied or distorted that relation” – Markell stakes his alternative approach to justice on a heterogeneous account of agency that necessitates an ongoing negotiation with, and an ethical critique of, one’s own epistemic and existential limitations, privileges, and claims to authority.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 428; Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, pp. 34-36, 180.

Disrupting the expectations engendered by conventional tropes of narrative identification is an important element of Resnais's attempt to raise critical questions regarding the epistemic authority of perception and cinematic representation. In doing so, his aim is to work through an alternative ethical aesthetics, one that rests on what Markell calls "an avowal of one's own finitude."<sup>44</sup> The very first two shots of *Night and Fog* bear this out.

In a manner that might recall the late paintings of Van Gogh, the film opens with what appears to be a serene and empty landscape with dense low-hanging clouds, and the image's colors are made almost unnaturally vivid and bright with Resnais's use of the then relatively new Eastmancolor film stock.<sup>45</sup> What's most significant, however, with respect to its comparison to the final shot in *Van Gogh* is the camera's movement. The earlier documentary concludes with a frame that moves across "Wheatfield Under Thunderclouds" until it is completely absorbed by the darkness that first seemed to bleed its way into the edges of the painting. The previous chapter argued that this highlights the film's project of constructing a world according to the aesthetic tension between revealing and concealing, what Heidegger formulates as the strife between world and earth. *Night and Fog*, on the other hand, foregrounds this tension at the very outset, but finitude here is pronounced by way of the camera's crane down into a camp until the

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<sup>44</sup> Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup> In Kligerman's reading, the opening shot functions as a citation of Van Gogh's 1890 painting "Cornfield with Crows" – which he maintains is the closing image of Resnais's earlier documentary on the painter – in order to demonstrate how the strategic references to this particular painting by both *Night and Fog* and Celan's German translation reveal the aesthetic differences between filmmaker and poet. However, Resnais's *Van Gogh* does not end with "Cornfield with Crows" but rather with "Wheatfield Under Thunderclouds," and whereas Kligerman states that the initial stationary camera in *Night and Fog* "frames the blue sky with black birds flying over yellow fields" before dropping down to "reveal the barbed wire of the desolate camp," he is in fact conflating two different shots. There are no visible flying birds in the first shot, which eventually cranes down into the camp, and in the following shot – which actually does feature the distant birds that his comparative nexus between painter, poet, and filmmaker hinges on – there are no yellow fields, and the camera instead tracks backwards angled towards screen right into the camp. Kligerman's conclusion is that while Resnais's unrelenting commitment to the visual ultimately undermines the film's ethical ambitions, Celan "disposes of the image in order to foreground instead semantic traces" that demonstrate "what the camera is incapable of showing." Yet, Kligerman's own disposal of the image fails to carefully take into account what it is that the camera is attending to. Eric Kligerman, *Sites of the Uncanny*, pp. 155, 156-158.

frame's perceptual field is entirely enclosed within – obstructed by and mediated through – a wooden fence with barbed wires. If the final darkness that eventually engulfs visibility in *Van Gogh* underscores the film's investigation into the different forms of the foreclosure of aesthetic and existential possibility, *Night and Fog* opens by exhibiting a historical event as an especially tragic form of such finitude. As a site within which the frame's mobility comes to a rest and as a site that obstructs the initial view of the horizon, the concentration camp manifests a material limit situation not only in the general sense to art, perception, and reason but also and more specifically to *this* camera and *this* film.

This preliminary gesture of acknowledgement is so central to the film's structure that it is reiterated in the shot that immediately follows. The shot's initial image of black birds flying over an open field toward screen right again recalls Resnais's *Van Gogh*, in which the penultimate shot tracks rightward across the painting "Wheatfield with Crows" so as to give a sense of movement to the stationary objects in the original piece. The mobile frame in *Night and Fog*, however, troubles this animating power of the camera by drawing itself back away into the gates of the death camps. Whereas the vanishing point at the end of the film's opening shot is situated along the distant horizon of the landscape that is perceptually obstructed by the barbed barricade, the second shot's track into the camp eventually establishes a guard tower at screen right as the point at which the lines of the birds' flight, the wire fencing, field, and sky converge. In this way, the image directs our gaze to the guard tower and its own frames of visibility whose sole purpose was that of linking observation with the guaranteed continuation of the horrors that occurred within the gates. Thus, the film's reflexive staging of the limits of representation employs a classical one-point perspective in the composition of the second shot as a way to set into motion a complex perceptual network of culpability. In sum, Resnais begins the film by

implicating his own cinematic gaze with the material structures and aesthetic design of not only the limits of looking but also its evils.

Indeed, while *Night and Fog* carefully constructs a matrix of responsibility and complicity – that in varying degrees of explicitness includes the Nazi political and military apparatus, the collaborations of the Vichy government, the assumed perceptual-affective and ethical distance of tragedy's bystanders, and the conflicts surrounding French colonialism that were contemporaneous with the film's present<sup>46</sup> – it is important to note that the film's first indictment is leveled against itself. After its opening five shots, all of which comprise a mobile frame that moves through the present-day sites of the concentration camps as if in search of the possibility of a proper point of entry into its topic, the film cuts to black-and-white footage that offers a very brief glimpse into the visual archive of the Nazi rise to power. And while the shift from the present to the past is marked by the altogether abrupt sense of visual and musical contrast that was discussed above, the narrator's words clue us in on a challenging affinity that the film establishes between the two temporalities. As the camera glides toward screen right in the present-day camp of the film's fifth shot, what anticipates the cut – to the grainy, stationary, and monochromatic archival footage of German soldiers marching toward screen left – is the narrator's statement, "No footstep is heard but our own." Here, an utterance is eventually afforded its visual referent with the film's first image that features in-frame human action.

To be clear, in its elusive expression of subjectivity, the film is not identifying itself with Nazi soldiers but, rather, drawing attention to the appropriated archival footage as distinct from,

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<sup>46</sup> Sylvie Lindeperg, "Night and Fog: A History of Gazes," *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog*, edited by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 55-70; Louisa Rice, "The Voice of Silence: Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* and Collective Memory in Post-Holocaust France, 1944-1974," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 32.1 (2002): pp. 22-29; Matthew Croombs, "French Algeria and the Police: Horror as Political Affect in Three Short Documentaries by Alain Resnais," *Screen* 55.1 (2014): pp. 29-47.

yet integrally bound up with, its own cinematic project. Thus, when the narrator shortly thereafter states that “the machine goes into action” over clips from Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, what results is a profound and disturbing ambiguity about whether “the machine” underway is actually referring to the Nazi seizure of power and its subsequent organization of systematic dehumanization and mass murder, the cinematic construction of fascist political identity, or *Night and Fog*’s mobilization of its own narrative momentum. In its attempt at addressing the question of how the Holocaust came to be, the film’s turn to history charts out a complex genealogy of evil that implicates its own technological medium.

Such an acknowledgement of complicity plays out in two other important moments in the film. First, the reflexively contrapuntal configuration of sound and image that launches the film’s encounter with the past is later echoed during a moment that transitions from a sequence that shows present-day exterior footage of what the narrator states are prison blocks to archival footage of Himmler’s 1942 visitation of Auschwitz. After the narrator says that it is “useless to describe what went on in these cells” as the camera’s low-angle track along the outside of the building features a brick wall that is punctuated only by small, barred windows, the film cuts to a high-angle tracking shot to counter the constrained visibility of the prison cells with the open air vents that line the lower part of the building’s walls, accompanied by the narrators statement that although “men and women were methodically tortured for days on end...the air vents were not sound proof.” The perceptual tension between presence and absence in both the visible and auditory fields are marked by correspondence and discord: we can see the obstructed visibility of the building’s windows that bears out the narrator’s claim regarding the ineffectuality of describing what occurred inside the walls, but we cannot hear the sounds of suffering that the narrator suggests were clearly audible. However, in the subsequent shot – when the film cuts to

an archival image of Himmler emerging from a vehicle during his visit to Auschwitz in 1942 to oversee the implementation of the Final Solution<sup>47</sup> – what accompanies the transition to the archive is the sound of two rumbling beats on a deep percussion instrument that are almost indistinguishable from artillery blasts. Mirroring the film’s earlier transition that inaugurates its engagement with historical material, in which the narrator’s claim that “no footstep is heard but our own” is marked by an auditory absence that is then visually fulfilled by archival footage of marching Nazi soldiers, the film here also establishes an auditory absence that is subsequently fulfilled by the sound of the military machinery of death testified by the appearance of its architect. Additionally, similar to the earlier transition that interrupts the continuity of the present-day mobile frame that tracks from screen left to screen right with a still frame that features the Nazi soldiers marching from screen right to screen left, the transition here from a present-day mobile frame that tracks from left to right is also interrupted with a still image of Himmler whose gaze is fixed on something that is off-screen to the left. Thus, as before, by interlinking presence and continuity with absence and disruption, what results is a profound ambiguity about whose perspective we are invited to identify with. Nonetheless, the film is able to interweave its expressions of dread, critical detachment, and complicity as it stages its encounters with history.

Second, following the sequence of Himmler’s visit, during which the narrator cites him as saying, “We must destroy, but productively,” there is a series of shots that bear out what he

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<sup>47</sup> In regards to this sequence, Resnais’s earlier draft of the script reads, “The second visit of Himmler in 1942. The German war effort. The growth of the camps starting from this visit on. The twenty-two countries. ‘Tens of thousands of Russian women for digging anti-tank ditches, etc.’ The ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question,’ decided in 1942. ‘The inferior races must work for us. The Jews, the Poles, the Gypsies, and the Russians must be annihilated, but productively. Annihilation through labor is more productive,’ etc.” See Christian Delage, “Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*: A Turning Point in the History of the Holocaust in France,” *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, edited by Dagmar Herzog, translated by Stuart Liebman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), p. 363.

means by this: the planning and construction of crematoria, piles of corpses, the burnt remains of human figures, the material relics of various possessions that were stripped away from the victims, and the different products that were made using various parts of their bodies.

Himmler's vision for productive destruction not only efficient, effective genocide but also the productive use and aestheticization of the ensuing remains. While the narrator is able to declare that the hair of victims was used to make cloth, that their bones were used to make fertilizer, and that their bodies were used to make soap, he falls silent when the sequence ends with a shot that depict what use was made of the skin that was collected. A mobile frame tracks across a display of surgically removed portions of skin that feature various tattoo drawings, having once belonged to Buchenwald inmates but then violently extracted and preserved for lampshades, for aesthetic pleasure. But for whose aesthetic pleasure? Resnais's decision to decontextualize the clip from its original form – as taken by Allied forces during the liberation of the camps and later featured most prominently in the French newsreel documentary *Les Camps de la mort* (1945) and then exhibited at the Nuremberg trials – only to reconfigure it into his sequence on the material interconnections of production, aesthetics, and death results in an undermining of perspectival certainty and stability.<sup>48</sup> The frame is shot through with a plurality of historical gazes that ranges from the inhumane aesthetic ambitions of the Nazis and what might be reasonably imagined as an altogether different affective response by the documentarians of the Allied liberation efforts to

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<sup>48</sup> For an insightful reading of this shot in Resnais's film as staging a "crisis of representation" through a comparison with how the same image is presented in *Les Camps de la mort*, see Deberati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 108-111. Sanyal's discussion of *Night and Fog* elucidates the film's construction of an aesthetics of complicity and is framed according to a theory of multiple and mobile identifications: "Contrary to the widely received notion that the film transmits the traumatic experience of victims, these shifts in perspective convey instead the shifting identifications and mobile circulation of positions characteristic of Primo Levi's gray zone." See Deberati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, p. 104. For an account of *Les Camps de la mort* and its "unselfconscious" use of classical editing strategies to develop its rhetorical ambitions that may have been undermined by the traumatic nature of its footage, see Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*, pp. 33-36.

the diverse viewing conditions surrounding the footage's cinematic circulation, and it is precisely because *Night and Fog* withholds from disavowing any of these, at times, incommensurable gazes that the history of disembedding the flesh of these victims is here displayed as an unnerving perversion of André Malraux's *musée imaginaire*.

These examples underscore what John Mowitt refers to as the film's linking of "a painful reflection about an atrocious past to an unsettling reflection on the place of the very technical apparatus of memory in the production of that horror."<sup>49</sup> The film's elaboration of the resulting tension is laid out by Mowitt's analysis through close readings of a number of key moments,<sup>50</sup> including one sequence that delves into the grotesque activities of a concentration camp's "surgical block." It begins with a present-day shot that tracks toward screen right along the front of the building's exterior until the frame symmetrically centers on the entrance; cuts to a black-and-white photograph of an "SS doctor" whose gaze is directed left toward something off-screen; cuts to black-and-white footage of a "terrifying nurse" who is addressing someone off-screen to the left of the frame; cuts to a black-and-white image of a room with various medical equipment in which a stretcher strategically occupies the compositional bisection of the frame's perpendicular lines, over which the narrator states, "But what's behind the façade? Pointless operations, amputations, experimental mutilations"; cuts to a black-and-white image of a different room with a surgical table also occupying the frame's bisectional plane; and cuts to a close-up of the surface of the surgical table where its drain channels meet at a central hole that serves as the vanishing point for both the table and the image. The film then goes on to provide

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<sup>49</sup> John Mowitt, "Cinema as a Slaughterbench of History: *Night and Fog*," *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog*, edited by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 245.

<sup>50</sup> For his reading of how the film reflexively implicates itself through the title card of its opening credits, the first cut to archival footage, and the editing strategy employed in the deportation sequence, see John Mowitt, "Cinema as a Slaughterbench of History: *Night and Fog*," pp. 245-248.



graphically disturbing images and footage of what these “experimental mutilations” entailed, but according to Mowitt, what is most unsettling “about the deep grooves we see inscribed on the table top is not just the fact that they are designed to channel the blood of innocent victims, but that these grooves serve as the directional models for the very shots that have brought them to our attention.”<sup>51</sup>

In reformulating the ethical thesis of its earliest sequence, *Night and Fog* here underscores a persistent commitment to interrogate itself. This is executed both through the visual arrangement of the frame’s correspondence with the inscribed lines of the operating table and through its specific editing strategy, which cuts deeper into the dark activities of the surgical block in a way that binds perceptual agency – the SS doctor, the nurse, the original documenters of this space, and Resnais’s own framing – with death. Indeed, the tragic weight of this assemblage has already been pronounced in the image that immediately precedes this sequence, which features an emaciated inmate lying on his side and staring directly in the camera, while the narrator describes him as “a body of indeterminate age that dies with its eyes wide open.” For the victim of this network of gazes – the “it” – individuation, agency, and even life are stripped away.

To be clear, what results from this perceptual nexus is not any conventional sense of narrative identification. That is, we are prevented from identifying with some psychological interiority or subjective motivation of the dying victim, the doctor, or the nurse in a way that strikingly maintains aesthetic consistency with the formal features employed in the sequence of shots involving “The Cottage” painting in *Van Gogh*, which disavowed such identification with the woman in the white cap who stands at the threshold of a house. When *Night and Fog*

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<sup>51</sup> John Mowitt, “Cinema as a Slaughterbench of History: *Night and Fog*,” p. 244.

presents a close-up shot that centers on a doctor who looks off to something that lies beyond screen left and then cuts to a medium close-up of a nurse who is framed left to the center and is also looking off to something that lies beyond screen left, there is no coherent sense that the doctor and the nurse are occupying the same room at the same time, and there is little narrative information that would clue us in on what precisely they are looking at or what their intentions are. Instead, we are left with a perceptual line that is preserved as it cuts through these images, and a world is carefully expressed out of what is and is not given through a perceptual thread whose vectors convene on tools of cruelty and mutilation. Thus, whereas the pattern of revealing and concealing was built into the cinematic design of *Van Gogh* to reflexively elucidate the existential processes of aesthetic world-making, in the case of *Night and Fog*, the world that we are confronted with is one wherein the constitutive patterns of disclosure and death are profoundly disturbing and incriminating.

Discussing the shots leading up to the surgical table, Mowitt writes, “The film quite literally places itself under erasure here and it is not, therefore, surprising that this brief tour of the operating room concludes with a centered image of the slaughterbench traversed by the characteristic lines of erasure.”<sup>52</sup> In this way, Derrida’s development of *sous rature*, which is explicitly inspired by Heidegger’s own textual practice of acknowledging the necessity yet failure of his own philosophical project’s dependence on language by striking through words (i.e., “~~being~~”), finds distinctive cinematic articulation not only in the grooves inscribed on the surface of the operating table but also in the film’s subversive appropriations of the conventions of classical perspectival art, especially with its framing of the camp’s gates and surgical tables as

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<sup>52</sup> John Mowitt, “Cinema as a Slaughterbench of History: *Night and Fog*,” p. 244.

bisecting the visual composition of the image.<sup>53</sup> That is, while *Night and Fog* works toward an affirmative politics of mourning and memory by attempting to give insight into the horrors of Holocaustal genocide, it also strikes through, or crosses out, its own modes of representation and thereby imports ethical bearing to the constitutive interplay between presence and absence, disclosure and finitude.<sup>54</sup>

Here again we have an instance of Resnais's cinema working through the irresolvable yet generative tension between world and earth. This time, however, his work achieves this by expanding the scope of an aesthetic acknowledgement of finitude that opens up the expression of its own existential and epistemic limitations to include an exploration of its own moral culpability. What's implicated, however, is not limited to cinema's technological and aesthetic contributions to an optics of evil but, rather, fans out over its role in a much broader configuration of historical, sociopolitical, and conceptual forces – all of which constitute what Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman call “the concentrationary” – that gave rise not only “to a historically-created and realized system of terror that took place in real locations” but also “to a theoretical concept that emerges from this state of affairs as a new political possibility.”<sup>55</sup> Making an important distinction between the exterminatory and the concentrationary, Pollock and Silverman offer an account of the latter as a new form of bio-political power relations – in which the institutional formation of subjectivities operates by way of a radical dehumanization –

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<sup>53</sup> Gayatri Spivak, translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). See also Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” *Pathmarks*, edited and translated by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 291-323.

<sup>54</sup> An altogether different kind of erasure was imposed on the film upon its release when French censors demanded the removal of the photograph of an on-looking French officer at the Pithiviers internment camp. Instead of complying with such a demand, Resnais was able to strike a compromise by superimposing what appears to be a beam on the image to cover up the officer's distinctive *képi*. See Ewout van der Knaap, “The Construction of Memory in *Nuit et Brouillard*,” *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, “Introduction: Concentrationary Cinema,” *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog*, edited by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 4.

that was most tragically manifest in the Nazi camps yet remain pervasive through modern political and epistemological systems wherein sovereign terror is normalized.<sup>56</sup> If the aim of forging an encounter with, and resisting, this concentrationary system in its historical and ongoing manifestations underwrites the political ambitions of Resnais's film, its ethics is developed out of an aesthetics of continual self-acknowledgement that is prompted by some disquieting yet crucial questions:

What place might cinema as a visual technology and a mass medium itself have had in creating and sustaining the *concentrationary* imaginary and massified aesthetics of Nazi totalitarianism? What treacherous and compromised aspects of the cinematic might *Night and Fog* have had to, or failed to, negotiate as a political and historical work that would have to use materials created by the perpetrators – both perpetrator imagery as well as the spectacular use of cinema as a means to document this universe?<sup>57</sup>

It is by way of repeatedly foregrounding these questions that the film contends in its own ways with the double character of art, or as Jacques Rivette famously put it in reference to the film, the “point is that the filmmaker judges that which he shows, and is judged by the way in which he shows it.”<sup>58</sup>

Toward the end of the *Night and Fog*, the film offers footage of different individuals responding to their interrogation during the Nuremberg trials: “‘I am not responsible,’ says the Kapo. ‘I am not responsible,’ says the officer. ‘I am not responsible.’” The film then cuts to an image of a camp inmate whose defeated and broken appearance is accompanied by the narrator’s question, “Then who is responsible?” It is precisely in this nexus of failed ownership that the ethical burden taken on by the film is expressed through – in frustration, desperation – its own acknowledgement of complicity, which serves as the foundation of its critical project and from

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<sup>56</sup> Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, “Introduction: Concentrationary Cinema,” pp. 14-16, 26-27.

<sup>57</sup> Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, “Introduction: Concentrationary Cinema,” p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Rivette, “On Abjection,” translated by David Phelps and Jeremi Szaniawski at <http://www.dvdbeaver.com/rivette/OK/abjection.html> (accessed 12 July 2016). Originally published as Jacques Rivette, “De l’Abjection,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 120 (June 1961): pp. 54-55.

which a challenge to the viewer is explicitly developed. As the film tracks one last time across the rubble of what now remains of the concentration camps, the narrator leaves us with these final words: “We turn a blind eye to what surrounds us and a deaf ear to humanity’s never-ending cry.”<sup>59</sup>

If the radical modernism of the film’s critique of the concentrationary system rests in large part on its reflexive grappling with the cinematic apparatus’s fraught relationship both to the unique suffering produced in the name of the Third Reich and to the ongoing suffering associated with contemporary forms of political evil, Resnais’s other documentaries from this period expand this critical project beyond the concentrationary to other forms of social dehumanization and technological reification. That is, his critical project of engaging with other historical manifestations of political and cultural violence is mobilized through an aesthetics of self-acknowledgement that draws renewed attention to the constraints and complicities of the cinematic medium.

For instance, in the 1953 documentary *Statues Also Die* (*Les Statues meurent aussi*), which Resnais co-directed with Chris Marker and which was censored by the French government for several years, Western colonial appropriations of African bodies are mapped out along a perceptual matrix of violent gazes in the interest of ethnographic research, aesthetic appreciation, recreation, and labor. The film itself participates in this exploitation, especially in its lengthy sequences wherein African sculptures are displayed against a de-historicized and decontextualized black backdrop, into which the film’s visual horizon recedes during its final tracking shot in a way that recalls the closing image of *Van Gogh*. Moreover, the film

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<sup>59</sup> One generative possibility of the film’s closing shots is discussed by Adam Lowenstein, who locates in Resnais’s configuration of the ruins “a privileged potential for generating the shock of the allegorical moment.” Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 108.

acknowledges its own medium's role in the sociopolitical and technological framework that make such cultural appropriations possible by gesturing to itself – at the end of an extended sequence that demonstrates the manipulability and viability of black bodies within the economies of mass entertainment, mechanical production, agricultural industry, and science – through a medium close-up that features a photographer facing the direction of the cinematic frame with his camera. Immediately prompted by the bright flash of the photographer's camera light, which momentarily whites out the frame, the film cuts away to a funeral procession and the narrator ruminates on memory and death.

This strategic positioning of representational technology within the frame's mise-en-scène is also employed at the very outset of Resnais's 1956 documentary on the Bibliothèque Nationale. *All the World's Memory* (*Toute la mémoire du monde*) opens with title credits that are displayed over a still shot of a movie camera mounted on a tripod in what appears to be the library's storage. The frame becomes mobile and tracks away from the camera and brings into view a microphone attached to an overhead stand. The visibility of the microphone serves as a cue for the voiceover narration that establishes the film's affinity to Resnais's ongoing investigations into memory, its representational expressions, and finitude: "Because he has a short memory, man amasses countless memory aids." The shot continues moving along its trajectory toward a disheveled pile of manuscripts to reveal an industrial Klieg light that then promptly flashes its bright light not only to illuminate the surrounding objects but also to create a momentary blinding effect, which is used both semantically to reiterate the theme of recollection and oblivion and also syntactically to insert the film's first cut. Thus, the film's exploration of the institutional regulation and standardization of "universal knowledge" – touted in terms of archival mastery and full epistemic accessibility that has been taken to serve as "an alibi for the

silence surrounding World War II and the Algerian War”<sup>60</sup> – begins with a sequence that acknowledges that the specific features of its own presentational capacity is thoroughly determined by a technological apparatus that is implicated in both the wonder and terror evoked by modernity’s project of total accumulation and registration.

And finally, in his last documentary of this period *The Song of Styrene* (*Le chant du Styrene*), which was commissioned by the French plastics company Pechiney, Resnais challenges the temporal logic of origination through a reverse trajectory that begins with final plastic goods and transitions to the mechanisms of synthetic molding, before ending with a petroleum refinery enveloped in smoke and a shot of a misty ocean surface. According to Edward Dimendberg, while the film’s beginning is characterized by an aestheticized abstraction that presents plastic products completely suspended from history and devoid of a discernible location, it increasingly alludes to historical and spatial specificity in a manner that subversively stages the “veritable return of repressed geopolitical relations.”<sup>61</sup> This process culminates in sequences depicting the extraction and processing of raw material – which the narrator explicitly claims “is found from Bordeaux to the heart of Africa” – thereby situating the production of plastics within “the larger dynamics of global trade and decolonization.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the film critically acknowledges its medium’s technological acquiescence to the temporal logic that integrates the practices of the industry by way of a frame whose movement is consistently motivated not by perceptual agents but rather by the mechanical motions of assembly and by the lines and curves of industrial design, by way of an editing scheme that corresponds with the rhythms of production, and by way of a narrative structure whose search of origins ends with

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<sup>60</sup> Steven Ungar, “Scenes in a Library: Alain Resnais and *Toute la mémoire du monde*,” *SubStance* 41.2 (2012): p. 75.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Dimendberg, “‘These are not exercises in style’: *Le Chant du Styrene*,” *October* 112 (Spring 2005): p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Dimendberg, “‘These are not exercises in style’: *Le Chant du Styrene*,” p. 84.

domination – a play of forces wherein the environment is reduced to natural resources. Indeed, as Dimendberg has insightfully shown, accompanying an image of a red plastic bowl suspended against a black backdrop, the film’s first lines of narration after the title credits is “O time, suspend your bowl. O plastic where do you come from?” – a pun on Alphonse de Lamartine’s 1817 poem that includes the verse, “O time, suspend your flight.”<sup>63</sup> With the replacement of time with a manufactured object and the substitution of elusive ephemerality with the physical specifications of origination, the film demonstrates its own perpetuation of modernity’s substance ontology of temporality. Here, a bowl exhibits the form of time that predicates, and is predicated by, a horizon thoroughly determined by calculability, instrumental orderability, and commodification.

Whether the focus is on concentrationary terror, colonial exploitation, the systematic regulation of what constitutes knowledge, or the commodifiability of the world, each film’s unique investigation into a singular form of cultural violence contributes to an account of postwar modernity in which reductive technological, socioeconomic, and political conditions are thoroughly determinative. Nevertheless, these films remain committed to an experimental aesthetics that seek to challenge such determinative conditions, and they do so through admissions of complicity: their calls for responsibility or their insistence on remembrance are persistently tortured by a guilt, whose expression is contingent upon the very structures of reification they critique. This, then, is what Adorno calls the “unsolvable aporia” of art, and the specific way in which Resnais’s cinema navigates this tension – between, on the one hand, the totalizing efficacy of a disclosive paradigm that reduces all beings to so many stockpiles of usable resources and, on the other, the resistant and alternative possibilities of art – provides a

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<sup>63</sup> Edward Dimendberg, “‘These are not exercises in style’: *Le Chant du Styrène*,” p. 69.



significant intervention on the philosophical conversation regarding the apparent conceptual impasse in Heidegger's formulation of enframing and *poiēsis*.

## V. Art and Finitude

In returning to the critique of Heidegger's later writings, we can now situate what Feenberg and others have referred to as an aporia that emerges from Heidegger's accounts of technology and art – namely, the incompatibility of asserting the political efficacy of any given particular with the totalizing characterization of enframing – within a wider set of ethical questions surrounding postwar aesthetics. Furthermore, insights drawn from the ways in which *Night and Fog* has attempted to address these questions can help us better appreciate the generative possibilities of this aporia. That is, the previous section has argued that, rather than taking up some mistaken conviction in some capacity to resolve the tension between a cinematic working through of traumatic history and the problems posed by the very medium through which such memory is navigated, constructed, and reconstructed, Resnais's film maintains this tension as an aesthetic antinomy that thoroughly structures the form of its approach to the concentrationary. And it is precisely through the film's inscription of a self-acknowledgement of finitude into its very cinematic configuration that the staging of this aporia takes a decisively ethical form. Drawing from the insights afforded by Resnais's cinematic practice, what I want to suggest here is that Feenberg's critique of Heidegger overlooks the generative possibility of this aporia, because his reading of Heidegger's distinction between enframing and *poiēsis* fails to take into account the critical role that is occupied by finitude.

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger makes it clear that neither enframing nor *poiēsis* is reducible to a subjective attitude to be willed or a set of practices to be

adopted. Indeed, Heidegger states that while “man drives technology forward” and thereby “takes part in ordering as a way of revealing,” the overarching mode of disclosure through which this ordering unfolds “is never a human handiwork.” Enframing is thereby totalizing in its claim upon humans “to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve.”<sup>64</sup> By contrast, freedom, for Heidegger, comes in the form of an altogether different claim, and yet this saving power is not external to the danger; its possibility stems from within it. Heidegger points to their shared essence by tracing them back genealogically to *technē*, an ancient Greek mode of revelation that, in an earlier lecture course delivered in the late 1930s, he describes as neither an “ordering of beings” nor “art in the sense of mere skill and proficiency in procedures and operations” but, instead, a grasping of “beings as emerging out of themselves in the way they show themselves.”<sup>65</sup> And though he draws on the close relationship between *technē* and *poiēsis*, Heidegger is not making the case that it is possible to somehow retrieve the way in which beings came into presence during the ancient Greek epoch. Rather, he is gesturing toward the ongoing possibility of the freeing claim made by *poiēsis*: “Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing there shimmers that veil that covers what comes to presence of all truth and *lets the veil appear as what veils*.”<sup>66</sup> While Heidegger claims that all “revealing belongs within a harboring and concealing,” what fundamentally distinguishes enframing and *poiēsis* is how each specifically stands in relation to that harboring and concealing – finitude.

On the one hand, the distinctive neologism for the revealing associated with *poiēsis* is *Entbergen*, which Heidegger not only employs for its etymological preservation of the opposition between a bringing forth and concealing but also explicitly links to the Greek *alētheia*

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” pp. 18-19.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic,”* translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 154-155.

<sup>66</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” p. 25.

in order to invoke his ongoing investigation into the kind of unconcealment that maintains the tension between presencing and absencing. On the other hand, enframing's disclosive capacity is described as a "challenging," the German word for which is *Herausfordern* – the literal translation being "to demand out hither."<sup>67</sup> It is through such challenging-forth that what is constitutively concealing is rendered unlockable with the right tools or right knowledge, and everything is revealed according to its orderability without any room for the indeterminate.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the nothing is foreclosed, and the important tension between revealing and concealing is ruled out. In addition to its exclusion of epistemic finitude, the revealing of enframing "never comes to an end," and therefore the temporal finitude that characterizes the "coming-to-pass" [*Ereignis*] of what comes into presence through *alêtheia* is replaced by a deceptive "permanent enduring."<sup>69</sup> And it is precisely this disavowal of finitude – which he elsewhere describes as a "dis-jointure" between presence and absence which bears out a "rebellious whiling" that "insists on sheer continuation"<sup>70</sup> – that Heidegger locates in particular cultural practices and metaphysical systems of thought as resulting from the very mode through which beings are disclosed in the modern epoch.

Thus, what critics have identified as an aporia in Heidegger's writings on enframing and *poiēsis* is rather a philosophical attempt at staging the very tension between revealing and concealing that the essence of modern technology forecloses. And while he never contends that

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<sup>67</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," pp. 10-12, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," pp. 16, 30-33. For an account of how Heidegger describes the modern epoch's insistence on a permanent presencing that expels absence as linked to traditional metaphysics' refusal of acknowledging finitude, see Karin de Boer, *Thinking in the Light of Time: Heidegger's Encounter with Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000): pp. 176-188. For a reading of the crucial role that "coming-to-pass" understood as concrete finitude occupies in Heidegger's accounts of truth and art, see Alejandro A. Vallega, *Heidegger and the Issue of Space: Thinking on Exilic Grounds* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), pp. 166-186. For a seminal interpretation of Heidegger's later writings that ascribes an essential role to finitude as "the absence that opens the open," see Thomas Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34.2 (2001): pp. 183-202.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Anaximander's Saying," pp. 167-168.

such a staging itself constitutes a definitive overcoming of the kind of metaphysics that finds its most dangerous manifestation in the modern epoch's mode of disclosure,<sup>71</sup> drawing out the essential role of the nothing in the *alêtheiac* structure of truth remains a demonstrative gesture toward what he calls "this other possibility" that yields insight not only into the finitude of enframing but also a "decisive confrontation with it."<sup>72</sup> It is because such gesture in its manifold forms must remain immanent to the essence of technology that Heidegger privileges the realm of art so much so that "The Origin of the Work of Art" couches "this other possibility" in terms of the aesthetic tension between world and earth – between an artwork's setting up of a referential horizon of intelligibility and the working through of its own phenomenological limits. Therefore, it is through aesthetically configuring the interplay between disclosure and finitude that the artwork – despite its object condition and the cultural currency it is easily reducible to in its passage through various curatorial, academic, or financial institutions – bears out the possibility (if only a possibility) of a decisive confrontation.

## VI. Conclusion

Resnais's engagement with historically specific cases of political and cultural violence through reflexive investigations into the constraints and complicities of the cinematic medium's own representational apparatus, Adorno's appeal to a form of art which seeks to speak horror through a silence that is suffused with suffering and guilt, and Heidegger's poetics of finitude each grapples in distinct ways with the possibility of aesthetic confrontation with technological,

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<sup>71</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 136: "Talk of the end of metaphysics must not mislead us into thinking that philosophy would be done with metaphysics...[All] endeavors reacting against metaphysics...are precisely re-active and thereby fundamentally dependent on metaphysics."

<sup>72</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 35.

political, and metaphysical evils that the work of art itself emerges from and contributes to. Moreover, rather than seeking to resolve this impasse or double bind, each ascribes an ineliminable role to acknowledging the failures, limitations, and impermanence of the very modes and mediums through which they maintain and work through this tension. And while the generative capacity of this tension is grounded in an acknowledgement of finitude, the resulting ethical possibilities take very different forms.

That is, whereas Adorno and Resnais are in pursuit of an aesthetics that explicitly struggles with the possibilities of political agency, Heidegger's unique delineation of ethics is primarily predicated on his broader philosophical project of charting out the ontological structures of an existential freedom that is rooted in the openness of the being of beings. To be sure, while it might be suggested that Heidegger is most concerned with what makes possible agency as such and not with the traditional, value-laden conception of ethics that is associated with humanism, the gap between the ontological and the ontical bears a disturbing quality in light of his controversial political activities and his subsequent silence. While the following chapter will address the problem of agency and elucidate how art materially works through the in-between space of the ontological and the ontical, this chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Heidegger's most profound failure.

Among Heidegger's most persistent and scathing critics is Adorno, who famously built a case against the obscure language of fundamental ontology and its alleged resulting in an ahistorical abstraction of being away from the sociopolitical site of ontical beings.<sup>73</sup> While it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine each of these claims, the most damaging

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<sup>73</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 117-119; Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, translated by Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

critique concerns Heidegger's Nazism. The outrage and disappointment that prompts the critique is in no need of justification beyond pointing to the concentrationary politics of the Third Reich that Heidegger participated in, contributed to, and later failed to explicitly acknowledge, but one of the many ways in which it nonetheless finds tragic illustration is the impact it had on Celan, who had defended him against many of Adorno's other criticisms, whose own poetry was deeply influenced by his close readings of over two dozen texts by Heidegger, and whose parents did not survive the Nazi labor camps as he did.<sup>74</sup> Whatever his own instrumental ambitions may have been and regardless of how the cultural milieu, institutional pressures, or his subsequent political disenfranchisement might help situate or explain his behavior, Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism, the pro-nationalist speeches he delivered and the totalitarian and racist policies of the *Gleichschaltung* he enacted during his rectorate at the University of Freiburg from 1933 to his resignation in 1934, the anti-Semitism that is undeniably evident in the first series of his recently published *Black Notebooks*, which are comprised of personal notes from 1931 to 1941, and the general silence he maintained regarding this throughout his life are all, as Maurice Blanchot emphatically put it, "unforgivable."<sup>75</sup>

However, Adorno's specific claim that Heidegger's philosophy – with particular emphasis on *Being and Time* – is "fascist to its innermost cells," an argument that gained a great deal of renewed vitality after Victor Farías's much-debated 1987 publication of *Heidegger and*

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<sup>74</sup> James K. Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation 1951-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. xii, 97, 139-141. While Lyon provides a thoroughly detailed historical account that challenges the following intuition, Maurice Blanchot goes so far as to claim that Heidegger's silence "plunged Celan into despair and made him ill." See Maurice Blanchot, "Thinking the Apocalypse: A Letter from Maurice Blanchot to Catherine David," translated by Paula Wissing, *Critical Inquiry* 15.2 (1989): p. 479.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Wolin, "Introduction: 'Over the Line': Reflections on Heidegger and National Socialism," *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, edited by Richard Wolin (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), pp. 1-22; Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Mahon O'Brien, *Heidegger, History, and the Holocaust*, pp. 11-21; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 155-160; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, translated by Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 40-54; and Maurice Blanchot, "Thinking the Apocalypse," pp. 478-479.

*Nazism*, remains speculative. To put it differently, it is not clear that Heidegger's pioneering existential analytic – i.e., challenging the reductionism of correspondence theories of truth, substance ontology, and metaphysics of presence by instead insisting on propositional knowledge's derivative relation to the fundamental structure of care that is built into our everyday projects and that is thereby disclosive of how we are constitutively bound up with the world, with others, and with finitude – is underwritten by a fascist or anti-Semitic program of thought. And yet, the case in Heidegger's defense, that his philosophy is not intrinsically fascist or anti-Semitic, also remains speculative. While the problem is one that probes at the elusive role of interpretation at the intersection of intention and deed, it is complicated by the gravity of his political actions and only exacerbated by his silence. Despite the wealth of information that has been, and continues to be, made available from the publication and translation of his archived body of texts, there is a real limit to the kind of accessibility that is desired in any attempt at resolving this particular question.<sup>76</sup>

Here, I wish only to propose as yet another piece of speculation that Heidegger's ultimate failure is that his political affiliations and his personal aberrations do very little to embrace – and, in fact, run counter to – the rich insights afforded by his work. The irresolvable yet generative tension between disclosure and finitude that occupies a central role throughout Heidegger's philosophical project is neglected by his own exploitative ambitions and his subsequent refusal of acknowledgement. Thus, the problem is not with the aporia in Heidegger's thought but rather with its very abandonment. By deliberately seeking to inaugurate a “new beginning” and

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<sup>76</sup> Jeff Malpas, “On the Philosophical Reading of Heidegger: Situating the *Black Notebooks*,” *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks 1931-1941*, edited by Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), pp. 3-22.

demanding it into presence through the promise of National Socialism, Heidegger betrays his own case for heeding the “call of conscience” that attunes us to the nothing.<sup>77</sup>

This is where Resnais’s cinema surpasses the shortcomings of Heidegger’s philosophy not only by acknowledging finitude in a way that encompasses epistemic and existential limitations but also by broadening out the scope of these limitations so as to place a site-specific emphasis on distortion, culpability, and guilt. It is in this way, as will be further explored in the next chapter, that Resnais’s cinema is able to aesthetically articulate an ethics that is neither universalist nor exclusively ontological but, rather, is grounded – visibly and painfully – in the flesh.

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<sup>77</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1962), p. 318.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MOVING IMAGE OF ANXIETY

#### I. Introduction

The preceding chapter argued that despite the criticisms against Heidegger's later writings as producing an aporia between enframing and *poiēsis*, it is this very tension that not only is ineliminably generative for Heidegger's overarching critical project against the history of Western metaphysics but also has a wider resonance with the historically contemporaneous problematic in postwar aesthetics regarding the possibilities of art. An important aspect of this criticism, however, points to a much deeper concern regarding the relationship between the ontological and the ontic in Heidegger's oeuvre – that it results in an unbridgeable gap between the two, that the ontic is thoroughly ontologized, or that the ontic is attributed with a merely epiphenomenal character.<sup>1</sup> According to this view, whether the focus is on the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* or his later accounts of modern technology and epochal historicity, Heidegger's philosophy is rendered universalist and idealistic as it abstracts away from cultural,

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Feenberg, "The Ontic and the Ontological in Heidegger's Philosophy of Technology," pp. 445-450; Don Ihde, *Heidegger's Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives*, pp. 114-127; Dana S. Belu and Andrew Feenberg, "Heidegger's Aporetic Ontology of Technology," pp. 13-14; Patricia J. Huntington, *Ecstatic Subjects, Utopia, and Recognition: Kristeva, Heidegger, and Irigaray* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 67-75; Tina Chanter, "The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology," *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, edited by Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), pp. 73-108; Michael Fagenblat, "'Heidegger' and the Jews," *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks 1931-1941*, edited by Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), p. 151; Michael Zimmerman, "Ontical Craving versus Ontological Desire," *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire: Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson, S.J.*, edited by Babette Babich (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), pp. 501-523; Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 115-125; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 119-131; Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), pp. 42-48; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 143-155, 181; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, pp. 80-87; Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 11-15.

political, and aesthetic particulars and is thereby unable to articulate an ethics that is grounded in concrete social relations.

Similar concerns are couched in the criticisms that have been leveled against Resnais's first feature-length film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). Widely hailed as a canonical cinematic work of postwar European modernism and often cited as an avant-garde classic, it has since nonetheless attracted several objections, the most consistent of which echoes reservations raised over *Night and Fog* and specifically deals with the issue of universalism. That is, Resnais's treatment of history strips away the specificities of trauma by, instead, generalizing and allegorizing a vastly painful event to either emphasize its contemporaneity with current political affairs as in the case of *Night and Fog* or, in the case of *Hiroshima mon amour*, poeticize it as a decorative backdrop for what Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit call the "luxurious masochism of bourgeois love."<sup>2</sup> The critical stakes of the latter film's aesthetic abstractions have led some to ultimately ask "Why Hiroshima?" and others to claim that the film perpetuates a Eurocentric "instrumentalization of Japanese suffering."<sup>3</sup>

Binding both sets of criticisms is a vital commitment to inveigh against philosophical or aesthetic works that subsume particulars under comprehensive ontologies or prominent narratives, the political results of which can resonate with systems of thought that foreclose the possibility of resistance and even perpetuate the conditions of cultural imperialism. The aim of

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<sup>2</sup> Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Richie, "'Mono no aware': Hiroshima in Film," *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, edited by Mick Broderick (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), pp. 35; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 14-19. See also Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 467-468; Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 167-179; Rotem Kowner, "Hiroshima as a Personal and National Allegory: Revisiting *Hiroshima mon amour* and *H Story*," *Broken Narratives: Post-Cold War History and Identity in Europe and East Asia*, edited by Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 43-51.

the following two chapters is not to provide a definitive defense of Heidegger or Resnais in the face of that commitment shared by the foregoing objections, which ought to be upheld as important occasions for thinking through the political shortcomings and regressions of those cultural practices that not only carry historical significance in the discursive formation of contemporary taste and judgment but also (and especially) those that are commonly invoked for their influential critique of modern forms of dehumanization and appropriation. Instead, I want to take seriously the specific terms of these objections in order to develop an account of both the philosopher and the filmmaker as engaging with the problems of reductionism in ways that are much more complicated than the standard charges of universalism presume.

The present chapter will take up a careful examination of *Hiroshima mon amour* to, first, delineate how the film further elaborates on the aesthetics of acknowledgement that characterizes Resnais's earlier documentaries. By way of deepening the previous chapters' investigations into the formulation of an ethics that is grounded on an acknowledgement of finitude, the analysis of *Hiroshima mon amour* will demonstrate that the film develops a sustained meditation on the unique relationship between skepticism and cinema, which brings to sharper focus the profound existential costs that such acknowledgement must entail. Section II concentrates on the film's prologue to illustrate how the perspective of one of the film's two central characters is compositionally prioritized primarily as a means for the film to articulate its dialectically reflexive interrogation of the role of representation in knowledge claims about the historical trauma relating to Hiroshima's atomic destruction in 1945. That is, the prologue sets the stage for the rest of the film by establishing a crucial link between its use of focalization and its critique not only of the expressed content of the focalized perspective but also of the very representational strategies that give it shape. Furthermore, the prologue's turn to the cinematic

archive gradually signals a significant shift, in which the weight of perception is uprooted from its preliminary grounding on evidential veracity and is gradually pushed toward a groundlessness that evokes helplessness and despair. Thus, the initial emphasis placed on epistemological finitude gives way to a reflection on existential finitude, and Section III will center on the film's exploration of the latter through the aesthetic composition of its fictional story component. With these insights, I will argue that, while the experiences of the European character are narratively privileged as critics have rightly pointed out, the film is mainly concerned not so much with her "attainment of individual being"<sup>4</sup> but, instead, with the destabilization and dissolution of her "individual being." The European character's memories and experiences are accentuated insofar as they are situated within a broader narrative economy in which perceptual agency is gradually and deliberately emptied out.

## II. Skepticism and Acknowledgement in the Prologue to *Hiroshima mon amour*

After first having spent a few months working on a commissioned short documentary on the atomic devastation of Hiroshima, Resnais's reservations about too closely reiterating the style and theme of *Night and Fog* eventually gave way to his collaboration with Marguerite Duras on a fictional tale of a romantic affair between an unnamed French actress (Emmanuelle Riva) and an unnamed Japanese architect (Okada Eiji) – designated in Duras's original script only by the stressed pronouns "Elle" (Her) and "Lui" (Him) – set in Hiroshima fourteen years after the atomic event. To be sure, while the film's fictional narrative structure significantly affords a set of generic parameters that are different from those of the earlier short non-fiction films, the concerns over the fraught relationship between representation and trauma remain

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<sup>4</sup> Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 177.

central. This is not only made clear in Duras's preface to the publication of her screenplay, in which she claims that "all one can do is talk about the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima,"<sup>5</sup> but the ethical antinomy between the necessity of representation as a site of memory and the impossibility of any representational act to speak the contingent specificity of historical and individual trauma is developed throughout the film and is established at its very outset. In a number of important ways that will be delineated below, the prologue to *Hiroshima mon amour* takes up and elaborates on Resnais's ongoing critically reflexive project of staging the tension between enframing and *poiēsis* through an aesthetic acknowledgement of finitude.

In its opening, the film intercuts between, on the one hand, the two protagonists sensuously intertwined in a spectral embrace and, on the other hand, a set of tracking shots exploring past and present Hiroshima in ways that recall the experimental style of *Night and Fog*. All of this is accompanied by an off-screen dialogue. Prompted by the architect's accusation that she "saw nothing in Hiroshima," the actress offers a catalogue of her experiences of the city and its traumatic history in order to defend her claim to knowledge. As if to provide some perceptual correspondence with the actress's words, the film transports us to a hospital, to the Peace Memorial Museum, and through the streets of Hiroshima – the visual configuration of which edits together present-day filming with archival footage. Such correspondence marks an important point of departure from Resnais's earlier documentary projects in that the film's narrative is heavily structured around the relational dynamics and perspectives of diegetic characters. Here also, however, the conventions of character identification are upset, and the semblance of correspondence between word and image soon runs into complications that bear

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<sup>5</sup> Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour*, translated by Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 9.

out the film's reflexive caution in its approach to perception, representation, and collective suffering.

The actress's response to the architect's challenge begins with, "I saw everything. I saw the hospital – I'm sure of it. The hospital in Hiroshima exists. How could I not have seen it?" In tandem, the film cuts to an exterior shot of a hospital, before a tracking shot takes us down one of its corridors, where women are standing guardedly in front of doorways along the left of the frame and looking directly into the camera. Unhindered by the row of arresting stares, and as if insisting on validating the actress's own perceptual claims, the camera continues its track into one of the rooms, but it does so by way of a cut that abruptly alters the path of its movement as it enters the room from the opposite direction, thereby producing a brief moment of spatial disorientation. This is formally reminiscent of the deportation sequence in *Night and Fog*, which jarringly inserts discontinuous edits into a series of shots that are otherwise organized according to visual continuity as it charts out the course of a train on its way to a concentration camp. Considering that the deportation sequence is immediately followed by the film's first encounter with the archival space of the camps, this reflexive strategy foregrounds the fact of its own construction at the moment it is transporting itself into the traumatic past. In a similar way, the disruption of linear and coherent movement in the earliest tracking shots of *Hiroshima mon amour* draws attention to how the film's engagement with this particular historical event is delimited by a number of insurmountable conditions and, especially in this instance, the diegetic perspective to which it gives perceptual form. And yet, this perceptual form is immediately placed under scrutiny and rejection. Once the frame enters the doorway, the film cuts to a series of shots that show three different patients turning their gazes away from the camera. There is an

unsettling atmosphere of intrusion, and what emerges from this matrix of looks is that the perceptual acts of both the camera and the actress are called into question.

If here we have the dehumanizing costs of claiming perceptual access into the suffering of others, the sequence continues to investigate the very possibility of such a claim. Indeed, the architect responds to all of this with a simple but confident refutation, “You saw no hospital.” Accompanying this statement, the film cuts back to the same hospital corridor with the same mobile framing employed earlier. However, this time, the space has been emptied out of all the people that formerly stood outside the doors, most of which are now shut closed. The only human figure is the distant back of a woman who disappears as she ascends a set of stairs at the far end of the hallway. The repetition and variation of this tracking shot not only raises questions about the veracity of the actress’s claims, but it also complicates the cinematic image’s correspondence with her verbal recounting. Does the architect’s rhetorical intervention prompt a moment of self-doubt and a perceptual revision in the actress’s memory of the hospital, or is the film presenting a memory space that is deliberately vague about when it occurs and to whom it belongs?

When the architect insists again that she “saw nothing in Hiroshima,” the actress maintains that she visited “the museum” four times. The film then cuts to the Peace Memorial Museum, offering six static exterior shots that, according to Nina Varsava, reflect the museum’s function: “that of formalizing Hiroshima’s nuclear history into a straightforward and orderly unit.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, if the hospital sequence at once establishes and complicates the actress’s exposure to the personal suffering inscribed on the bodies of specific individuals, turning to the museum would seem to be a strategic maneuver on her part to strengthen her case by demonstrating how

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<sup>6</sup> Nina Varsava, “Processions of Trauma in *Hiroshima mon amour*: Towards an Ethics of Representation,” *Studies in French Cinema* 11.2 (2011): p. 113.

her experiential cache encompasses a much broader and institutional authenticated encounter with collective suffering. Nevertheless, as with the hospital sequence, the film's articulation of perspective is not unambiguous. To be sure, there are a number of moments when the cinematic image links up with the content of the actress's narration. For instance, when she states, "I myself, lost in thought, looked at the scorched metal," we see metal beams and a bicycle that have been deformed by the atomic blast; and when she asserts that she "saw the bouquet of bottle caps," the film provides a mobile close-up of a mound of bottle caps that have been warped and melted together. However, the camera's movement through the interior space of the museum is not motivationally committed to an exclusive realization of the actress's narration; rather, the sequence is shot through with a multiplicity of individual and institutional perspectives.

Complicating the actress's visual horizon is the perceptual agency of others, which is, at first, registered through a moment of correspondence when the actress's statement that she "saw people walking around" is accompanied by tracking shots of visitors making their way around the museum. As if they too, like the "scorched metal" and "bouquet of bottle caps," are leveled down to so many tokens that merely attest to the actress's own experiential claims, one particular shot features a woman and three children observing various displays as they approach a wall of photographs, the glass-plated surfaces of which bear their reflections. That is, the activity of spectatorship itself is framed in a way that bears out the actress's assertion, "I watched the people." Additionally, the perceptual nexus that emerges in this moment between spectator and representation effectuates the film's broader critical concerns. Regarding the reflection of the woman and children on the wall of photographs depicting the aftermath of the atomic bomb, Varsava writes, "Showing the reflectivity of the glassed-in images, the camera breaks the illusion



of photograph as ‘window to reality,’ and undermines its totalizing power.”<sup>7</sup> To this, we might add that, featured in a mobile long shot, the reflections on the glass-plated surfaces of the photographs actually obscure the visibility of their historical content in a way that stages Stanley Cavell’s description of the ongoing legacy of romanticism as underwritten by a desire to restore a “conviction in reality” strictly by way of subjectivity. Indeed, it is in response to the architect’s enduring skepticism that the actress seeks to affirm her convictions in an epistemic connection to historical reality – gesturing beyond herself by thus far invoking the hospital, its patients, the museum, and its visitors and displays – that the film nonetheless repeatedly undermines by demonstrating how history, in this case, is being rendered legible through an “endless presence of self.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, by establishing a mimetic relationship between the camera, the actress, and the museum’s visitors, the shot’s reflective and reflexive doublings of spectatorship interrogate the appeal to perceptual knowledge, along with the conditions of truth that it presumably satisfies, in a manner that carries out Resnais’s ongoing critique not only of the totalizing dominion of subjectivity that motivates his disavowal of the norms of narrative identification but also of the evidentiary role that is conventionally ascribed to representation.

The film’s expression of skepticism over claims of epistemic access to historical trauma – whether the focus is on the French actress, the cinematic apparatus, or the general activity of spectatorship – is further reinforced by attending to the space in which this perceptual matrix is

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<sup>7</sup> Nina Varsava, “Processions of trauma in *Hiroshima mon amour*,” 113-114.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, p. 22. Cavell’s account of the “unhinging of our consciousness from the world” is developed out of his long-standing engagement with philosophical skepticism over the knowledge claims we make about the external world and other minds. In the film’s initial staging of this skepticism, another instance wherein subjectivity is principally imposed between the actress and a representation of the historical event in question comes by way of the film’s first close-up of an archival image. In contrast to the preceding shots of the photographs and artifacts displayed in the museum, the film here clearly presents the image of a severely burned victim’s down-turned head without reflective traces of the photograph’s glass surface and without the picture’s borders and frame. The shortcomings of an isomorphic model of narrative empathy comes into sharp focus as the image is accompanied by the actress’s statement, “I was hot in Peace Square. 10,000 degrees in Peace Square. I know it.”

curated: the museum. Exploring a site constructed according to the logic of framing historical memory, the film's investigation into the limitations of representation centers on the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum as a point of entry into the disturbing archival film footage that depicts the horrors of nuclear destruction. According to Varsava, the shot that features the wall of pictures reflexively situates the film within the representational systems that it challenges. She notes that "before offering any close-up of a particular photograph, Resnais depicts the way the photographs are arranged – as rows of framed images delineating the museum for systematic viewing."<sup>9</sup> The mobile frame, which features the reflection of the woman and the children, registers the off-screen interior spaces of the museum that are also reflected on the glass surfaces of the photographs. Designed to produce the kind of gaze that Resnais's film both disputes and participates in, the entire sequence maps out the film's critical engagement with mediation.

Furthermore, it is precisely by way of the museum's arrangement of its displays that the film draws out a temporal structure that is common to historical articulation. Indeed, compared to the cinematographic and editing strategies employed in the previous hospital scene, there is a higher degree of continuity in sequential ordering and correspondence between word and image. In addition to the examples cited earlier, in which the film offers shots that match the actress's narration, the first several mobile frames in the museum scene each move from screen left to screen right and maintain a sense of dynamic coherence between cuts. For instance, the scene's third tracking frame is a low-angle shot that displays a metallic reconstruction of the atomic bomb that hangs from the ceiling, and the camera's movement pivots on the front tip of the bomb, slightly swiveling screen left as it tracks to the right. Following this is a high-angle shot featuring a small-scale reconstructed model of a devastated Hiroshima in its immediate aftermath

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<sup>9</sup> Nina Varsava, "Processions of trauma in *Hiroshima mon amour*," 114.

of the bombing, and the camera's movement similarly tracks to screen right as the frame slightly swivels to the left, pivoting its motion at the center of the model. During the tracking shot of the bomb, the actress narrates, "The explanations, for lack of anything else," and as if reiterating the weight of this lack and perhaps the actress's desire for some kind of epistemic compensation, her narration after the cut to the small-scale model of Hiroshima states, "Four times at the museum at Hiroshima." And corresponding with her subsequent claim, "I watched the people," three boys enter the frame – one after the other in rhythmic choreography – and lean over the low wooden rails to peer at the model. The sequence is organized according to the temporal schematics of cause and effect: one frame that tracks across the bomb gives way to another that continuously and mimetically tracks across the resulting ruination, and word and image are presented here in tandem as if to coherently exhibit the actress's own curation of her memories. What results is the film's implication of itself in the material configurations of historical time that not only give shape to the museum's explanatory and compensatory ambitions but also is determinative of the actress's claims to knowledge.

Drawing on the unique position that cinema occupies in this critique, Resnais expands the museal conception of time beyond the museum's walls by transitioning to pre-existing cinematic material of the nuclear aftermath. When the architect again refutes her by saying, "You saw nothing in Hiroshima," the actress attempts to strengthen her case by turning to film, "The films were as authentic as possible." This prompts the frame, which has been steadily tracking alongside the museum displays, to suddenly pan to the right, rapidly to the point where the image of the museum's interior space is blurred so as to produce a seamless passage to an exterior shot of chaos and destruction from *Hiroshima*, Sekigawa Hideo's 1953 film. This transitional moment – which generates the semblance of continuity from the museum's present to the

cinematic past by way of a cinematographic and editing effect that nonetheless calls attention to the fact of its own construction – obscures the boundaries not only between museum space and the filmic archive but also between fact and fiction in its citation of shots from Sekigawa’s own politically controversial work that features an extensive cinematic dramatization of the direct aftermath of the nuclear explosion.

Resnais’s appropriation of Sekigawa’s film is significant for a couple of reasons that are spelled out in the two parts of the actress’s narration that accompanies the film’s transition into the *Hiroshima* clips. She says, “The illusion, quite simply, is so perfect that tourists weep. One can always scoff, but what else can a tourist do but weep?” With her first sentence, through which she attributes the affective power of cinema’s capacity for persuasively staging dramatic reconstructions, the film elucidates its choice of pulling from the divisive *Hiroshima* among the numerous *hibakusha* films – some of which, like Shindō Kaneto’s 1952 *Children of Hiroshima* (*Genbaku no ko*), were far more popular with both domestic and international audiences – that were produced between the lift of the Allied Occupation in 1952 and Resnais’s production of *Hiroshima mon amour* in 1958. To be sure, Sekigawa’s film had its advocates including early reviewers that upon its initial release praised the unsettling realism with which the immediate aftermath of the atomic blast was sensationally reproduced as well as those who were politically or professionally associated with the progressive Japan Teacher’s Union, which commissioned the film and eventually helped in its funding and distribution. Nonetheless, the consequence of creating what the actress calls an “illusion” that is “so perfect” has been a reception history checkered with the highly publicized battles it faced with censorship – remaining, of course, more indirect than the strict bans on militaristic or nationalistic material imposed by the Occupation government between 1945 and 1952 – which involved, among other incidents,

politically charged attacks on the film by American and British publications, Shochiku's abandonment of its initial plans to distribute the film, the Education Ministry's reversal of its previous endorsement over what they perceived to be an overtly "anti-American" agenda, and a drastically pared down re-edit for its U.S. theatrical release in 1955.<sup>10</sup> Thus, by drawing on this film, *Hiroshima mon amour* makes an important gesture to the political, financial, and discursive constraints that externally shape the production and circulation of works that, like Sekigawa's *Hiroshima* and Resnais's own *Night and Fog*, cinematically forge an encounter with a traumatic past. Additionally, by situating the citation of Sekigawa's film within the prologue's dialogical interrogation of representation, this moment of reflexive intertextuality in *Hiroshima mon amour* continues to draw attention to the limits that are intrinsic to cinematic mediations of history, no matter how sensationally realistic or perfect the illusion.

The second sentence of the actress's narrational statement constructs a link between the specific mode by which the images are presented and the question of perceptual agency. Indeed, the clips from Sekigawa's *Hiroshima* are graphic in their depiction of devastation and loss, and the opening frame in the citational sequence is a medium shot that features an injured and

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<sup>10</sup> Mick Broderick and Junko Hatori, "Pica-don: Japanese and American Reception and Promotion of Hideo Sekigawa's *Hiroshima*," *The Atomic Bomb in Japanese Cinema: Critical Essays*, edited by Matthew Edwards (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015), pp. 77-87. For an account that was originally published in 1961 of the differences between Shindō's *Children of Hiroshima* and Sekigawa's *Hiroshima* and of the Japan Teachers Union's financial role in the production of both films, see Donald Richie, "'Mono no aware': Hiroshima in Film," pp. 20-37; for a comprehensive study on the American Occupation government's regulation and censoring of the Japanese film industry through its Civil Information and Education Section and the Civil Censorship Detachment, see Kyoko Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, 1945-1952* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); for an account of how Cold War politics in Japan-U.S. relations in the early post-Occupation period resulted in indirect methods of censorship, which generated problems for the production and distribution of Japanese films that were deemed too anti-American or seen as influenced by communism, see Christopher Howard, "Re-orientating Japanese Cinema: Cold War Criticisms of 'Anti-American' Films," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* (2016): pp. 1-19; and for a reading of postwar Japanese films that shifts the analytical privilege away from the discourse of cinematic realism and instead calls for greater attentiveness to signs of allegorical moments that might engender disruptive and transformative encounters with historical trauma, see Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*, pp. 83-109.

anguished Japanese man in military uniform surrounded by rubble and fire, directly addressing the camera in desperation. Wrested from its narrative context and stripped of its original audio, the camera's expressed perspective is not made clear as it seems that the man is pleading for help, presumably addressing the sort of tourist that the actress explicitly identifies herself with. In Sekigawa's film, however, through a series of shot/reverse-shots that adhere to classical continuity editing, we learn that the Japanese man (Katō Yoshi) is helplessly responding to his wife's final cries. Here, the camera is taking up the position not of the weak and incapacitated passersby – to whom he frantically and unsuccessfully begged for help earlier after a failed attempt at lifting the rubble alone that has trapped his wife in their burning home – but rather of the rapidly spreading flames that will eventually claim her life. In addition to the screen's physical placement conveying the danger that operates as a barrier to the man from rescuing his wife, we are clued into the mounting intensity of the fire by way of its growing presence in the shot, beginning with tips of the flames briefly flashing on the edge of the frame and quickly developing into a large blaze that appears to momentarily consume the entire image. However, in *Hiroshima mon amour*, the shot is considerably abbreviated, and the film cuts away without clarifying the original shot's narrative motivations for its framing. And yet, the configuration of the screen remains decisive. In its repurposing of this shot, Resnais's film shifts the burden of powerlessness that is conveyed by the camera's perspective from its original form, which highlights the tragic inability of the woman to escape the flames and the inability of her husband to save her, to a viewing position that is articulated by the actress's reference to the helplessness of the film's viewer.

It is with this particular shot, which takes up a strategic position in launching *Hiroshima mon amour* into the cinematic archive, that the film sets up a major theme it will further develop:

the cinema offers a specific mode of bearing witness to history that is nonetheless characterized by its foreclosure of any possible intervention into the very world that it discloses. In this way, the film “maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it.”<sup>11</sup> If what Cavell calls an “endless presence of self,” which speaks to the romanticist legacy of attempting to restore our convictions in the world by way of our subjectivity, is critically and reflexively staged in the film’s previous sequences wherein the actress makes various appeals to her perceptual experiences to sustain her claims to knowledge, then here the film bears out an altogether different relationship between self and world. Cavell describes this alternative as an overcoming of subjectivity that is mechanically and phenomenologically rooted in the material basis of the cinematic apparatus and the viewing conditions that its projected screening engenders.<sup>12</sup> In noting that the film screen functions as a barrier, he writes, “It screens me from the world it holds – that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me – that is, screens its existence from me.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the key insights that Cavell draws from this observation is that the resulting experience of perceiving a world, from which I am screened out, might be said to satisfy the incompatible (and otherwise unachievable) desires of a version of philosophical skepticism that insists not only on an unmitigated objectivity as a criterion for truth claims but also on some privileged standpoint that would somehow provide the perceptual access needed to empirically adjudicate the veracity of such claims. The impossibility of meeting both epistemic demands,

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 72-73: “The material basis of the media of movies...is, in the terms which have so far made their appearance, *a succession of automatic world projections*. ‘Succession’ includes the various degrees of motion in moving pictures: the motion depicted; the current of successive frames in depicting it; the juxtapositions of cutting. ‘Automatic’ emphasizes the mechanical fact of photography, in particular the absence of the human hand in forming these objects and the absence of its creatures in their screening. ‘World’ covers the ontological facts of photography and its subjects. ‘Projection’ points to the phenomenological facts of viewing, and to the continuity of the camera’s motion as it ingests the world.”

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 24.

which forms the basis of the skeptic's wholesale rejection of knowledge, is all too simply entailed by human finitude in that to make any claim about the world that transcends the limits of perception requires an infinite perspective. That is, "A world complete without me which is present to me is the world of my immortality."<sup>14</sup> Yet, Cavell's account of cinema places emphasis on the affective consequences that follow from the radical form that the medium offers to the skeptic's desire: "here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist – even, alarmingly, *because* it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes."<sup>15</sup> Perhaps, because the viewing of a film's world is not only all it *takes* but also all one can *do*, whatever epistemic gains might be attributed to the disclosive capacities of the cinematic medium are anchored down by the limits of embodied agency. Thus, while satisfying the desire to surmount certain limitations intrinsic to perceptual experience, cinema nonetheless poses its own unique set of constraints that stem from the kind of human finitude that skepticism wishes to transcend. What follows from such constraints is a deep sense of loss as when Cavell writes that film "takes my life as my haunting of the world."<sup>16</sup> Whether and how this is acknowledged constitutes, for Cavell and for Resnais's film, an ethical problematic.

To review, in contending with the sustained skepticism over her claims of insight into the suffering of others, the course taken by the actress as she offers various cases in her defense begins with her recounting of a hospital visit and transitions to her multiple trips to the museum. What results is a trajectory, which moves from the presence of the imposing gaze that the hospital patients reject to the museum's display of artifacts, reconstructions, and photographs, that develops toward more explicitly mediated modes of historical memory. But whereas these

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<sup>14</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 188-189, emphasis in original.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 160.



latter representational forms are physical, especially with respect to their invitation of a diverse yet institutionally limited set of embodied viewing practices, the actress's turn to the cinematic archive reflexively exhibits a mode of witnessing that perceptually registers a state of affairs in a way that "overcomes our fixed distance" yet does so by screening its world from her (and our) reach. If the progression of the actress's evidential ambitions finally arrives at a medium that seems to fulfil the fantasy of achieving the presentness of a world through an automatic foreclosure of subjective intervention, the weight of this trade-off compels the actress to articulate the affective inflections of Cavell's claim that "film is a *moving* image of skepticism."<sup>17</sup> She reminds us that one can resort to a refusal of acknowledgement by way of some dismissive indignation when she states that "one can always scoff." It is, after all, only a film. But we might also say that it is precisely the fact that it is only a film – "viewing it is all it takes" – that can serve as the basis for an alternative response, one couched in the expression of vulnerability and mourning that underlies the actress's question of whether there is anything else she can do but weep. Rather than offering a consolatory answer to the question, the film follows up the military man's desperate address to the camera with several more shots also taken from Sekigawa's *Hiroshima*, all of which feature dynamic representations of destruction, mutilation, and despair.

"No." Cued by the architect's unsympathetic repudiation, the film cuts to a disturbingly serene landscape shot that pans across an area of the city reduced to ashes and debris. "What was there for you to weep over?" He remains unconvinced. It is with this articulation of doubt that *Hiroshima mon amour* goes on to demonstrate that the stakes of film's capacity to overcome subjectivity run deeper than the actress's stated experience of helplessness. By continuing to

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 188, emphasis added.

place skeptical pressure on the actress's claims to knowledge, the film sets out to elucidate the greater existential costs demanded by the kind of acknowledgement – in this case, an ethical form of acknowledging one's own relationship to a particular historical trauma – that the film's dialogical interrogation of representation works toward.

The actress responds by stating that she “saw the newsreels.” The panning landscape shot of an entirely razed site, along with much of the subsequent footage in the newsreel sequence, was originally featured in the historically elusive and politically vexed film *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. The first major documentary of the bombings, it was ultimately subjected to a complex series of confiscations, censorships, and cinematic reappropriations.<sup>18</sup> Shot by a Japanese production team from Nippon Eigasha (Nichiei) with the aid of medical researchers from the Education Ministry in late 1945 and completed under the supervision of various research committees of the American Occupation government – including the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey and the Joint Commission for the Investigation of the Effects of the Atomic Bomb – *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* has been commonly criticized for the “absolute indifference” with which it renders the devastating results of the bombings into “an accumulation of scientific facts [that] eliminates the human factor altogether.”<sup>19</sup> That the “human factor” is taken to be eliminated is a crucial point, and it alludes not only to the film's unsettlingly insensitive and objective tone but also to the prioritization of

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<sup>18</sup> While the two different prints that are held by the Japanese Education Ministry and Toho Studios – the latter of which appropriated the reels that a core group of the film's production team hid away in fear of losing their work entirely to military seizure, are held suppressed from public accessibility – the print that was furtively sent to the U.S. Archives is openly available. For the definitive English-language account of the history and aesthetics of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, see Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 191-219.

<sup>19</sup> Nibuya Takashi, “Cinema/Nihilism/Freedom,” *The Japan/America Film Wars: World War II Propaganda and its Cultural Contexts*, translated by Hamaguchi Kōichi and Abé Mark Nornes, edited by Abé Mark Nornes and Fukushima Yokio (New York: Harwood, 1994), p. 128; Kogawa Tetsuo and Tsurumi Shunsuke, “When the Human Beings Are Gone,” *The Japan/America Film Wars: World War II Propaganda and its Cultural Contexts*, edited by Abé Mark Nornes and Fukushima Yokio (New York: Harwood, 1994), p. 167. Both texts are cited in Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, p. 193.

its scientific commitments, which is reflected in the de-centering of the *hibakusha* experience in favor of lengthy technical sequences on, for instance, the effect of the blast and thermal radiation on different metal and non-metal structural materials and on various types of plant and animal life.

While the more prominent interpretation of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* attributes its dehumanizing aesthetic to the American interventions on the project,<sup>20</sup> Abé Mark Nornes provides a more complex account that – while elucidating the tight political and military control over the film’s circulation – is nuanced by a careful reascription of authorship to director Itō Sueo and his Nichiei team in matters of production and post-production. In doing so, Nornes delineates a number of the film’s subversive aspects, chief among which is that while it establishes the perspectival authority of scientists and medical researchers as “governing the filmic investigation,” its documentary voice enunciates the originary yet intangible and self-annihilating site of destruction: the Epicenter.<sup>21</sup> In voicing “the point of view of the bomb itself,” the work maintains the impossibility of adequately representing the tragedy experienced by the victims of the atomic blasts by, instead, adopting the discursive practices and material forms that gave rise to the bomb and its detonation. Nornes writes:

Documentary theory has dealt exclusively with the meaning humans invest in sounds and images of reality. This focus frequently obscures the absolute indifference of the sounds and images themselves. The complicated apparatus that captures, preserves, and reproduces light is fundamentally inhuman, like the bomb itself. Only in the brief vacuum of meaning when all human maps were obliterated by the extreme violence of the atomic explosions could a film like this be made.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> That the Japanese translation of the film’s title renders “effects” as *kōka*, which can be taken to mean the kind of “results” that are produced by experimentation, has been explicitly invoked as demonstrating the intention underlying both film and bomb for reducing human beings to “mere research material.” See Kogawa Tetsuo and Tsurumi Shunsuke, “When the Human Beings Are Gone,” p. 167; cited in Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, pp. 210-211.

Thus, Nornes attributes the unnerving and enduring power of the film to the Nichiei filmmakers' exploitation of the medium's "fundamentally inhuman" mode of disclosure by pushing as close as possible to the point where the "absolute indifference of the camera" interfaces with the "absolute indifference of the Epicenter."<sup>23</sup>

In light of this reading, we can better appreciate the significance of Resnais's appropriation of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, which directly follows the moment in the dialogical prologue's montage wherein the architect's persistent skepticism over the actress's epistemic case has led to an explicit appeal to cinema, the medium's unique mode of disclosure, and its intrinsic limitations. Whereas the citational sequence from Sekigawa's film prompted a reflexive consideration of the cinematic screen, which not only screens a world but also screens out the viewer's perceptual agency from that world, the series of shots pulled from the Nichiei documentary – prompted by yet another rejection of the actress's claims – offer insights into cinema's other material processes. That is, if the configuration of the cinematic screen was shown to render the phenomenological activity of spectatorship into what Cavell calls a "haunting of the world" and thus poses a critique to philosophical skepticism by exhibiting the affective stakes of satisfying the otherwise incompatible and unachievable desire for a "world complete without me which is present to me," the Nichiei sequence in *Hiroshima mon amour* presses even further on the troubling outcome of the skeptic's bid by cashing out the additional consequences of overcoming subjectivity. It does so by drawing attention to the inhuman and indifferent mechanisms mobilized for the original footage's recording and projection in a manner that resonates strongly with Cavell's treatment of the medium's automatisms – that it not only removes "the human agent from the task of

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<sup>23</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, pp. 214, 216.

reproduction” but also presents a world whose humans are “reduced in significance” and no longer “ontologically favored over the rest of nature.”<sup>24</sup> What results is a meditation on the kind of ontological leveling that gestures toward a radical form of negation.

The doubling of this ontological reduction is announced in the very first image of the sequence, in which a part of Hiroshima that has been completely leveled to the ground is featured in a distant panning shot that is reminiscent of the frames that move through spaces of horror and death in Resnais’s earlier documentary projects. In the original Nichiei film, this shot is accompanied by an American voiceover narrator stating in an authoritative yet impassive tone that “Hiroshima was instantly transfigured; there was nothing left but ruins, nothing standing to hinder a full view of the city.” Thus, a repeated emphasis is placed on the spectacle of negation: there is both nothing in the way to obstruct our view and also nothing to be seen. In Resnais’s film the same shot is offered with its own added discursive negation, a simple “no” that collapses the actress’s claims to knowledge into the visual horizon of absence. Here, neither the camera nor any figure in the image serves as the actress’s perceptual surrogate, and neither the camera nor any figure in the image makes an appeal to her limited agency. Instead, as the actress responds to the architect’s repudiation by making reference to newsreel footage, Resnais’s film continues its citation of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* by cutting to various clips – of a worm writhing through the earth, ants crawling over dirt, a maimed dog limping amongst rubble, and bandaged people making their way around ruined structures – in a way that expresses the “absolute indifference” with which the cinema levels down the architectural, natural, and human into the same fold of (in)significance.

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<sup>24</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 23, xvi, 37.

However, in addressing the point at which the radical negativity of the cinematic medium interfaces with the radical negativity of the Epicenter, Nornes is careful to note that the former holds only an enunciative relation to the latter and that the Nichiei film “never achieves a perfect representation of the point of view of the Epicenter.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, whereas in the Nichiei film this enunciative relationship remains unobtrusive insofar as its disturbing power is largely derived from obscuring the boundaries between the articulated indifference of its meticulously scientific tone and the “absolute indifference of the Epicenter,” Resnais’s citation of the footage places emphasis on the limitations and ethical implications of such cinematic enunciation. That the film, or any film, can never achieve “a perfect representation” of the Epicenter is precisely what is at the center of Resnais’s interrogation of cinema. To the extent that the phenomenological inaccessibility of death and trauma can be given voice, its entry into a shared horizon of legibility bears an intrinsic violence, the reflexive configuration of which underlies Resnais’s overarching project of critically placing the cinematic apparatus within the broader networks of technology and representation that have been instrumental in both documenting and contributing to the most traumatic events of the twentieth century.

In addition to this interrogation of the limitations and ethical implications of cinema’s attempt to enunciate the radical negativity of the Epicenter, Resnais’s appropriation of the Nichiei footage – especially with respect to its staging of an ontological leveling intrinsic to and exploitable by the medium – is important for drawing attention to the enunciation of cinema’s own radical negativity. At the heart of Cavell’s ontology of film is a consideration of encountering this specific kind of dispossession, which he frames according to a particular conceptualization of anxiety. In a passage that fleshes out this phenomenon by way of evoking

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<sup>25</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, pp. 214, 216.

the overwhelming sense of disavowal at work in *Hiroshima mon amour*, Cavell makes a direct reference to Heidegger's formulation of anxiety as that which lets the "world appear as such" in a way that forecloses the "self's intervention."<sup>26</sup> For Heidegger, anxiety [*Angst*] is a fundamental mood that constitutes a major breakdown in the contingent but ubiquitous referential nexus of significance, within which we always already find ourselves situated and that is pre-conceptually determinative of what and how the world matters to us.<sup>27</sup> In anxiety, beings as a whole slip away, the usual projects from which we derive an understanding of ourselves recede from our grasp and "sink into indifference," and what results is not just an involuntary bracketing of agency but a deep-seated form of depersonalization. For these reasons, when Heidegger claims that "anxiety reveals the nothing," he is establishing an important bridge between the ontical and the ontological, wherein the limits of intelligibility and our "ability-to-be" are given a distinctively affective shape through its disclosure in the collapse of everyday familiarity. And it is the phenomenality of such existential defamiliarization that Cavell points to when he claims that "our very distance and powerlessness over the world" is rendered by cinema as "the condition of the world's natural appearance" and that the "uncanny is normal experience of film."<sup>28</sup> Thus, resonating with Heidegger's account of anxiety as attuning us to the ontological groundlessness – the uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*] or the "not-being-at-home" – that we ourselves are,<sup>29</sup> Cavell ascribes to the uncanny an ontological role and similarly positions anxiety as an especially profound mode of acknowledging it. That is, anxiety is configured as an affective manifestation of the acknowledgement of finitude that undergirds Cavell's ethics.

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<sup>26</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 186.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 199, 156.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 189.

Through the dialectical unfolding of the prologue in *Hiroshima mon amour*, mapped out along a dialogue between claims to perceptual knowledge and their skeptical refutation, the film engages with “the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima” not only in its meditation on representational and epistemic finitude but also in its unique response to this impossibility by confronting the affective entailments of its own “fundamentally inhuman” mode of disclosure. That is, Resnais’s work continues to struggle with the ethical possibilities of cinema beyond acknowledging its inability to accurately and appropriately articulate a traumatic past and beyond acknowledging its own material culpability. Through the Nichiei citation, the form of this struggle develops into an encounter with the radical negativity of the Epicenter that prompts the film’s acknowledgement of its own existential finitude expressed as an anxiety over its own intrinsically groundless or empty center.

But a crucial tension emerges. Once the film presses on the point of contact between the radical negativity of the Epicenter and the radical negativity of the cinematic medium, how can an aesthetics of acknowledgement reflexively elaborate on the enunciation of its own empty center without recourse to a relatively stable system of shared significations? The stakes of this tension can be felt even in the original Nichiei film. In its configuration of the panning landscape shot of a razed Hiroshima, as if to offset the unsettling indifference of the image and spoken word, the film inserts a classical Western orchestral track which swells with a melodramatic intensity that seems bombastic and inappropriate in its efforts at countering the “fundamentally inhuman” vision on display. On the one hand, a mechanically indifferent apparatus records a catastrophic event that has itself created a “vacuum of meaning,” and, on the other hand, the music swells out of a desire to map on an experientially intelligible framework for such an event through familiar aesthetic tropes. This tension is taken up more



unambiguously by Resnais's film, as it is precisely during the Nichiei sequence of the film's prologue that a dramatic uncoupling occurs between frame and actress – which previously maintained a relational correspondence, whether the film's frame perceptually confirmed her claims or whether it established a critical distance expressing doubt. Here, however, while a series of shots from the Nichiei film present clips of people whose disturbing injuries are being medically examined (perhaps even displayed for the camera's ostensibly neutral and scientific gaze), the actress's narration takes a poetic flight. Over a shot that shows children suffering from hair loss as a result of the radiation, the actress states, "Hiroshima was covered in flowers." She continues, "There were cornflowers and gladioli everywhere, morning glories and day lilies," as the film, first, cuts to a shot of a young boy who looks away from the camera, wincing in pain as a doctor treats a severe laceration on his thigh, and, then, cuts to a shot of another young boy whose mouth has been torn open. While a pair of medical tongs cleans out the tissue that is exposed by the deep avulsion, the boy glances up at the indifferent camera. But the lyricism continues, and the actress speaks with increasing abstraction about the flowers and their promise of rebirth, vitality, and love, all the while the film resumes its medical catalogue of close-ups featuring children who have been mutilated.

Here again, the disclosive possibilities of cinematic documentation and expression run up against the material conditions that the apparatus shares with technologies of dehumanization and destruction. However, whereas the film's prologue restages the aporetic of art and locates an ethical response in exploring the existential stakes of acknowledging finitude that further develops the aims of Resnais's earlier documentaries, *Hiroshima mon amour* marks a departure from placing the burden of such acknowledgement primarily on the reflexive capacities of the cinematic form. One of the ways that it achieves this is by way of the fictional dramatic

narrative which places a more localized emphasis on the interpersonal relationship between actress and architect that eventually unfolds. As opposed to the criticism that reads the film's transition into the fictional narrative as one in which Hiroshima as an "ever absent-ed locus" has been set up only to be subsumed by the "psychic economy" and colonial sexual politics of love and desire,<sup>30</sup> the film's prologue makes it clear that representational and narrative practices of enunciating radical negativity are never unproblematic. The tension between the pain or annihilation that exceeds understanding and the urge to apply some kind of meaning by way of conventional representational practices underlies, for instance, the intentional design of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum's arrangement of displays that seek to construct and preserve the memory of an event, which the total accumulation of its exhibits cannot fully apprehend, the sentimental orchestral track that the Nichiei filmmakers felt compelled to add over the panning shot of a decimated part of the city in *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, the actress's rather sincere impulse to turn to poetic language in the face of overwhelming suffering and disfiguration, and the film's own narrative flight into a romantic tryst in the face of the impossible task of representing the specific historical and cultural valences of national trauma.

### III. The Moving Image of Anxiety

The first line of on-screen diegetic dialogue after the film makes its full transition from the prologue to the fictional narrative is spoken by the actress. "You have such beautiful skin," she states as her hand gently caresses the architect's back. With this, the dialectical investigation into the acknowledgement of the limits to thought, perception, and agency mediated through the

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<sup>30</sup> Earl Jackson Jr., "Desire at Cross(-Cultural) Purposes: *Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour* and *Merry Christmas*, Mr. Lawrence," *positions* 2.1 (1994): pp. 150, 153.

film's introductory experimentation with the documentary form becomes explicitly manifest in and on the bodies of the story's two central characters. That is, the words that have thus far constituted the dialogical staging of skepticism and acknowledgement are made flesh, and the prologue's reflexive meditation on the material conditions of cinematic finitude is here mapped onto the skin.

The actress follows up her comment on the architect's skin with a simple declaration, "You!" In response, the architect lifts his head up to look at her, "Yes, me. Surprised?" In this very first shot – with fingers that trace out the borders of their bodies and a brief verbal exchange characterized by a very simple deictic mode of address – the characters are clearly individuated for the first time in the film. This process of individuation continues over the subsequent shots, where we learn that the architect was not in Hiroshima on the day of the atomic bombing, that he was instead "off fighting the war," that he lost his family that day, that the actress is in town for a film in which she is acting, and that she is from Paris, before which she lived in Nevers.

We discover more about the protagonists during the following morning when they resume their conversation as they drink coffee, shower together, and go about getting dressed for the day. According to Christian Martin, whose study draws attention to the tactile viscosity of the wide range of diegetic surfaces in the film that collectively constitute a unique form of what he refers to as a topographical mode of empathy, this sequence of morning rituals exhibits the "washing, masking, and covering of the fragile flesh exposed during the night."<sup>31</sup> If it is out of the haptic interplay and overlay of these surfaces that a sense of these characters' identities eventually emerge, Yuko Shibata's incisive and nuanced analysis of the film's central characters as "chimerical" manifolds of past and present structures of national colonialism and transnational

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<sup>31</sup> Christian Martin, "Skin Deep: Bodies without Limits in *Hiroshima mon amour*," *French Forum* 38.1-2 (Winter/Spring 2013): p. 269.

collaboration goes further in elucidating the political and historical conditions that reverberate through the sequence's composition of their individuation.

Shibata observes that while the architect's introduction here – sporting Western attire, speaking French, and even perhaps consciously taking up the role of the actress's exotic Other, which is implied when, for instance, he seems pleased when she confirms that he is the “first Japanese” in her life – positions him as the colonized, there are a number of important and interrelated aspects to his identity which are often overlooked in the scholarship that all too simply depicts him as the object of the actress's colonial fantasies. First, there is the subtle and only reference he makes to his professional life as including work in politics, which coupled with his identification as an architect is suggestive of his contribution to the civic and national reconstruction project. Second, his earlier commitments to the Japanese Imperial Army gestures not only at his involvement in the country's own colonial history, whose power spanned across East Asia and the Western Pacific, but also at Hiroshima's own significant role in the colonial empire as a major military and economic center, which raises problems for the common practice of reducing its plural historicities down to one event. Finally, Shibata points to his fluency in French as a critical allusion to the collaboration between France and Japan between 1940 and 1945, during which French Indochina was subordinated to the Japanese empire by the Vichy regime under a joint agreement wherein the latter would retain control over the colony while the former exploited it as a strategic military base in the Second Sino-Japanese War. Bearing in mind Duras's personal historical connections with French Indochina – she was not only born and raised there but also worked for the French government's Colonial Office between 1938 and 1940, taking leave a couple of months after the Japanese military occupation of the colony – Shibata posits the plausibility of the architect having been dispatched to its military base,

imbuing new gravity to his statement that the actress is “like a thousand women in one.” In these ways, the film’s articulation of the architect’s identity is, from the very outset, intertwined with his military past and political present and is shot through with a diverse and at times antithetical set of desires and apprehensions that slide throughout the course of the narrative between the positions of colonizer and colonized.<sup>32</sup>

The narrative trajectory of the actress, on the other hand, undergoes a very different kind of development. To be sure, while the actress’s introduction in this sequence – complacently gazing out at the city from the lofty heights of her hotel room balcony while wearing a yukata and drinking coffee that she poured from a traditional Japanese teapot – situates her as the “colonizer or the occidental tourist,” Shibata’s insightful reference to the film’s allusions to the collaboration between France and Japan in French Indochina carries significant implications for how the film establishes the actress’s identity as bearing a similar multiplicity of colonial significations that can chimerically alternate between the various positionalities of colonialism.<sup>33</sup> And yet, when the actress returns to her bed where the architect remains asleep, the sight of his hand as it faintly twitches prompts her to slowly shift her gaze downward as the film cuts away to an exterior close-up shot that features a different hand twitching on the ground. The frame tilts up to reveal that the hand belongs to a fallen soldier whose uniform bears the *Litzen* collar insignia, and a woman is briefly shown lying on top of him as she frantically kisses his bloodied face. Shortly thereafter, the film cuts back to the earlier interior framing of the architect lying asleep in the hotel room and cuts once more to the actress as if to re-establish that it is indeed the linearity and continuity of her perspectival configuration that the cutaway unsettles. It is with

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<sup>32</sup> Yuko Shibata, “Postcolonial *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*: Franco-Japanese Collaboration in the American Shadow,” *The Trans-Pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society*, edited by Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2012), pp. 215-251.

<sup>33</sup> Yuko Shibata, “Postcolonial *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*,” p. 236.

this sudden and disruptive insertion of an, as yet, decontextualized image that sets into motion the process of her gradual undoing, and it is the first of many flashbacks that together offer a fuller glimpse into a profoundly painful and destabilizing event that she underwent fourteen years ago in her hometown of Nevers.

Through these flashbacks, along with her verbal recounting of the past, the film offers insight into her personal story involving a secret affair with a German soldier who was stationed in Nevers during the war. We learn that her lover was eventually shot and killed on the day they had planned to meet on the banks of the Loire to leave town together, only a day before Nevers was eventually liberated; that she held his body as he slowly died and maintained that position until his body was taken away the next morning; that her parents were disgraced and the townspeople cut off her long hair as a form of publicly shaming her; that the loss gave rise to a paralyzing sense of despair; that her cries of anguish and mourning led her parents to quarantine her in their cellar; and that she has since never shared this event with anyone else.

The Nevers story is presented in non-linear fragments, much of which is presented in the lengthy conversation between the actress and the architect that takes place in a riverside café. Anchoring the flashback sequences are two recurring sites of the past: the cellar and her bedroom. In the first shot we see of the latter, the actress – not yet twenty years old – is sitting lifelessly on a chair in the center of her room, the design of which bears striking resemblance to an image in an earlier work by Resnais. At a crucial juncture in *Van Gogh* where the film explores the deepening depression that leads to the artist's stay at the "Saint-Rémi asylum," the 1889 painting of van Gogh's bedroom in Arles is shown within a trembling frame as if the work is tenuously suspended over darkness, into which the image eventually recedes as it swiftly grows more distant and obscure. The painting of the bedroom in *Van Gogh* is cropped by

Resnais's frame, centering on the large window, as if the camera is positioned in the middle of the room. In *Hiroshima mon amour*, the camera takes up a similar position in the actress's bedroom in Nevers. In both the shot of the room in Arles and the shot of the room in Nevers, the bed – part of which remains off-screen – takes up the right side of the frame with the headboard lying against the wall directly facing the camera and the footboard extending out toward us. In both shots, the pillows and the sheets are white, the latter of which is pulled or folded over the dark bed spread that is visible on the lower half of the bed's surface. In both shots, the large window is centered. Beside the window in each shot is a wall frame that hangs left of the cinematic frame's center. The contents of this particular wall frame are obscure in van Gogh's piece but are visible in Resnais's iteration as a painting of a rustic scene that is reminiscent of the artist's Nuenen period. Underneath the wall frame in each shot is a small table, and each shot features a wooden chair that is positioned between the table and the bed. In the room in Arles, that chair remains empty, but the chair is occupied by the actress in the Nevers bedroom. She sits there lifelessly with a blank expression and, though we cannot hear it, we see her begin to shout, mouthing the name of her dead lover. It visibly intensifies into a scream, and she gets up and rushes toward the window, banging at it with her fists as her feet stomp on the floor. Her mother enters the frame from the left, and the camera tracks in closer as her mother pulls her away from the window. The movement and direction of the actress's body as she is pushed toward the right of the frame is preserved in what appears to be a match-on-action cut that creates a sense of continuity between the shot of her bedroom and the subsequent shot of her being quarantined to the cellar – her body hurling toward screen-right until the cellar's wall pushes against her back. In one instance, the painting of the bedroom in Arles drifts off into the darkness, and in the other instance, a match-on-action links the bedroom in Nevers to a dim

cellar. Both mark a transition into bodies being isolated from society and a descent into what the narrator of *Van Gogh* describes as “madness,” or what I delineated in an earlier chapter as “the nothing.”

What I wish to suggest here is that this traumatic event in the actress’s past resonates deeply with what Cavell and Heidegger refer to as anxiety, and as with Resnais’s earlier documentary *Van Gogh*, what is offered is not some special representational access to subjective or mental interiority but, rather, an aesthetic manifestation of a profound breakdown in the referential nexus that is constitutive of being-in-the-world. That is, *Hiroshima mon amour* privileges the actress’s personal story insofar as it preserve’s the prologue’s formal structure of tenuously employing conventional strategies of narrative identification only to eventually subject it to destabilization and interrogation. It is in this way that the film’s fictional component continues the prologue’s critical project of drawing out the existential stakes of responding to historical trauma through an acknowledgement of one’s own finitude – in this case, of addressing the radical negativity of the Epicenter by not only acknowledging the limits of representation and reason but also by acknowledging one’s own radical negativity. Thus, if the acknowledgement of one’s own radical negativity was taken up in the prologue by way of a reflexive interrogation of the cinematic apparatus, the film’s staging of the actress’s personal story is not intended to create a false equivalence between her suffering and the suffering that was caused by the atomic blasts over Hiroshima; rather, the film locates a moment of existential anxiety in the actress’s life to map out a site wherein the interfacing of radical negativities gestures toward the ethical possibilities of acknowledgement.

At a general level, the traumatic breakdown that the actress endured in Nevers is initially articulated by the film’s abrupt insertion of a flashback shot that is without sufficient contextual



information, and the cinematic form that later gives shape to the actress's recounting of her past to the architect in the riverside café maintains a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation. More specifically, all but one shot in the flashback sequences during the café scene are layered over with diegetic audio from and around the café. That is, we are rarely offered any sounds that are diegetic to the world of Nevers, as the film's presentation of the flashback sequences are accompanied by the background chatter of the other café patrons, the distant footsteps and traffic from outside the café, the chirping of crickets and croaking of frogs, and the occasional music playing on the vinyl record jukebox. This strategy corresponds with the interplay between presence and absence in the visual composition of the flashback sequences, much of which is confined to the limited visibility of the dark cellar where the only source of light is a small ground-level window that not only screens the linear unfolding of events in the external world for the actress's viewing but also materially screens her from engaging with it – for viewing in this way is all she can do. To borrow Cavell's phrasing, the window of the cellar takes her life as her "haunting of the world."

As if to mirror the actress's relationship to her world, the construction of the flashback sequences insists on the inaccessibility of – and that characterizes – her perceptual experiences. Her first description of the cellar is that it was "small, very small," and the first flashback shot we see of the space is from within, a low-angle medium shot that centers on a set of stone steps leading up to the small window. Already, the window takes up a central position not only in how the cellar is first presented but also in setting the stage of the actress's recollection of her breakdown. The audio track of this shot consists of the background noises of the café, which is made all the more conspicuous by the repeated sound of a car horn that seems to serve as a sound-bridge from the shot in the café to the flashback shot in the cellar. The following shot

returns us to the riverside café as the actress speaks of the Marseilles passing above her head. When she states that “it’s deafening,” the film cuts back to the cellar with the frame now closer to the window as we see the lower halves of figures marching down the street – the town’s architectural structures in the background are blurred and, despite the actress’s description of how “deafening” the Marseilles was, the sound we hear continues to be the background noises in the café. The film maintains this pattern. She states shortly thereafter, “The world passes by above my head, in place of the sky, of course. I watch that world pass by, hurriedly during the week, leisurely on Sundays. It doesn’t know I’m in the cellar.” As she says this, the film cuts again to the cellar, its framing now even closer to the window. This time, the actress is within the frame, her head resting against the wall as she looks outside. While the window’s mesh wiring and metal tracery are in clear view, which themselves draw attention to the window as a barrier and an aesthetic object, the outside world is completely out of focus – its visibility limited to the blurry silhouettes of passersby. One final iteration of this repetition comes when the actress describes seeing the town square at night, noting how large the space is and how “it curves in the middle,” but again, the film’s cut back to a centered frame on the cellar window reveals an external world that is out of focus.

The configuration of the cellar’s window delineates a gradually deepening breakdown of the actress’s relationship to her world. The film’s refusal to provide clearer visibility of the external world through the window, along with its refusal to offer audio that is diegetic to the world of Nevers, establishes an important distance that is not so much concerned with providing a conventional avenue for character identification as it is with constructing an aesthetic manifestation of the world’s withdrawal in a way that resists identification. Furthermore, with respect to the film’s representational schematic of presence and absence in the flashback

sequences, it is important to note that while we are shown repeated images of the violent death of the actress's lover (i.e., his body splayed on the ground as blood trickles from his wounds), the film chooses to restrict our perceptual access to the world that the cellar window afforded her. That is, according to the composition of image and audio in the flashback sequences, what remains unrepresentable is not her lover's murder but, rather, the very way in which the world appeared to her during this traumatic breakdown. Here, the material and phenomenological limits of cinematic representation runs up against the existential limit-situation of being-in-the-world, and this is consistent with Heidegger's own formulation that while anxiety discloses the nothing, into which the world and its beings recede, the nothing in itself remains unrepresentable. What the film does give contingent form to, however, is the affective character of this anxiety.

In addition to what has been discussed above, the world's withdrawal through anxiety is expressed in other important ways. For example, while most of the flashback sequences constrain the visibility of the spaces within and beyond the strategically framed windows of the bedroom and the cellar, there is a moment when we see the actress in the bedroom again, having been allowed to emerge from the cellar after promising not to scream anymore. She is lying on her bed, and her lifeless gaze doesn't appear to be fixed on anything in particular. As she states, "I'm afraid everywhere," the film offers a quick succession of three shots, each of which feature seemingly indiscriminate close-ups of random objects in the spaces of her confined despair: stains on the ceiling of her bedroom, an overturned wooden wheelbarrow in the cellar, and the top of her bedroom drawer that is decorated with random accoutrements such as a large mirror, small porcelain shoes, an empty candle holder, and a conch shell. It is not merely the familiar world outside her windows that have withdrawn from its referential nexus of significance, but

the objects that surround her no longer take hold of her and invite nothing more than her gaze. Resonating with Heidegger's distinction between fear and anxiety, in which the former is characterized by a determinateness or directed intentionality that the latter lacks, the actress's enunciation of an entirely diffuse yet oppressive affectivity prompts the film to register the indifference into which the world has receded, leaving only a gaze that has been emptied of agency.

Such dissolution of agency is further developed through narrational disarticulations of subjectivity and time. Later in the café conversation, the actress revisits in more detail the crucial moments during which she embraced her lover as he passed away. She states, "I couldn't find the slightest difference between his dead body and my own. His body and mine seemed to me to be one and the same." This tragic experience not only inaugurates the sense of depersonalization that she repeatedly invokes in her recounting of Nevers, but it also sets into motion the rupture of her temporal horizon, which itself withdraws into what Heidegger refers to as an unarticulated unity wherein the conventional distinctions between past, present, and future are blurred.<sup>34</sup> Her account of this moment is filled with multiple references to time: that they were "to meet at noon on the banks of the Loire" is how she begins telling this part of the story; it is when she "arrived at noon on the banks of the Loire" that she discovers her fallen lover, not "quite dead yet"; she stayed "by his body all that day and the following night"; it was in the "next morning" that they came to dispose of his body; Nevers was "liberated that night"; the cathedral bells "rang and rang," announcing a time that is no longer clear in its positioning within the story's chronology; he "took so long to die"; and when she poses to herself the abrupt question of "when," she admits that she doesn't know and shares that the "moment of his death

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 144.

actually escaped” her. In this way, temporality is designated, at first, in terms of a conventional appointment, before taking an oppressive form – the cathedral bells that indiscriminately puncture what Heidegger calls the “lengthening of the while” that she endured as she anticipated her lover’s death – that is enunciated in sharp contrast to the freedom promised by their plans of escaping together and by the political liberation of Nevers. Finally, time devolves into that unarticulated unity, the urgency of the “when” receding into indeterminacy so that the genesis of temporal disruption and disarticulation is itself displaced only to be marked by her memory of depersonalization.

Another instance in the flashback sequences of the disarticulation of subjectivity and time comes by way of the actress recounting to the architect that occasionally “a cat comes in to have a look around.” At this point, the film cuts back to the cellars with a long shot of the actress leaning against a stone partition that separates her from the steps that lead up to the small window. Here, we are offered a shot/reverse-shot sequence of close-ups that links up her blank gaze with that of a black cat in a perceptual exchange that Duras in her script notations describes thus, “Little by little she enters the stare of the cat. There is nothing else in the cellar except a single stare, the stare of the cat-Riva.”<sup>35</sup> She is deindividuated through a hybrid gaze that is not quite human and not quite otherwise than human, and when prompted by the architect’s question regarding time, she states that it was “an eternity.” In amending Plato’s famous line that “time is the moving image of eternity,” Cavell claims that “film is the moving image of skepticism” in order to suggest that the claims of philosophical skepticism are underwritten by a desire for a perceptual experience that is somehow also transcendent and impermanent, and as was argued in the previous section, the cinematic material and phenomenological realization of the skeptic’s

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<sup>35</sup> Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour*, p. 98.

incompatible desires ultimately engenders a deep sense of existential displacement wherein the constraints of human finitude are disclosed. Thus, the actress's appeal to eternity in naming the disarticulation of self and time demonstrates the tension that results when the existential costs of the moving image's satisfaction of philosophical skepticism entails the moving image's revelation of anxiety.

Eventually, as the actress puts it, this "eternity comes to an end," and the account of her gradual regaining of a sense of her world is visually mapped out in her Nevers bedroom. We see the actress rise from her bed and walk toward her dresser, and we quickly realize through the film's mobile frame that the camera is directed at the mirror – her movement toward the dresser captured as a mirror image, the frames of which only become visible as the camera tracks back. That her emergence from anxiety is framed by way of a frame recalls and responds to the earlier shot in the flashback sequence that staged her deepening into anxiety, wherein the cloistered framing of her bedroom was reminiscent of Resnais's previous practices of cinematically framing within frames of paintings. In one instance, she is diegetically and compositionally confined, and a quick swivel that matches the movement of her plunge into the cellar is unwilling to release her from the frame. And in the other instance, she emerges free from the frame as the camera further tracks back to show her touching this surface or taking up that object, observing the things in her world as if recollecting how they once appeared to her. Her narration of this moment is again filled with reference to time but now with much more determinateness and interlaced with statements that establish its re-coupling with agency and identity:

The cathedral bells ring at 6:00 every evening, summer and winter. One day I hear them. I remember having heard them before. Before, when we were in love, when we were happy. I begin to see. I remember having seen before, when we were in love, when we

were happy. I remember. I see the ink. I see the daylight. I see my life. I see your death.”

Here, time is no longer withdrawn into an unarticulated unity; the intelligibility of the world and its beings are no longer withdrawn beyond her grasp; and her sense of herself is no longer collapsed into a state of deindividuation.

However, there are a couple of important ways that the film complicates this moment’s expression of repossession. First, this shot in the bedroom comes after – and preserves the audio design of – the only instance in the flashback sequences where we hear what is presumably a sound that is diegetic to the world of Nevers. An off-screen scream accompanies the cut-away to an evening exterior shot that features the actress’s mother rushing from their home to embrace her daughter, who is standing by a tree, still covered in her lover’s blood sometime after being subjected to the public humiliation of the townspeople shaving her head. With that scream, all of the diegetic background audio from within and around the café are completely muted, leaving audible just the voices of the actress and the architect. As a result, in dropping the background noises of the present, this particular sequence – which lasts almost five minutes, beginning with the off-screen scream and finally ending with the architect abruptly slapping the actress – remains suspended from the rest of the conversation, and it achieves this by offering the first occasion in the film where a diegetic feature of the past disturbs the cinematic composition of the present as the eventual return to the café is also marked by the same audio design. Through this formal traversal, which in this case privileges the configuration of audio over the disclosive capacities of visual perception, the actress’s recollection of her restoration of conviction in the world is intimately linked with an aspect of the present world’s own withdrawal.

Second, the very placement in the scene’s sequential ordering of the moment in the bedroom that signals repossession conveys a sense of both fragility and violence. It is situated

between, on the one side, her account of the night she returned home after losing her lover and being publicly shamed and, on the other side, her account of first discovering her fallen lover and lying with him while he was dying. Positioned in a non-linear and fragmentary series of flashbacks, the moment in which she describes her reconnection with the world is made explicitly brief, and it is not only sequentially bookended by death, mourning, and anxiety but also sustained or suspended by the silencing of background audio that was inaugurated by the scream. That is, the phenomenon wherein she initially regains a sense of herself is fraught and marked by a profound tenuousness. Furthermore, if the formal traversal of background silence as it cuts across from the diegetic world of the past into the present conversation in the café gestures toward the very real possibility of anxiety's reemergence, the architect's morally disconcerting response by slapping the actress twice – catching the attention of the surrounding onlookers, whose startled gazes are registered by way of a quick succession of close-ups, while also emphatically reintroducing the background noises of the café – demonstrates that reconnecting with the world is a process which bears its own violence.

With repossession thus marked by fragility and violence, it should come as no surprise that the actress continues to share that, after the brief episode of reemerging from her anxiety, she screamed once more and was again sent to the cellar. The film cuts back to the cellar window, outside of which we can now lucidly see a group of bodies on the other side. In addition to this new clarity of visibility, a marble slips through the window's mesh wiring and metal tracery, bounces down the stone steps, and rolls onto the ground, at which point the actress enters the frame to take the marble in her hand, gently placing it against her face: "It was warm. I think it was then that my hatred left me. I don't scream anymore." Maintaining structural similarities with how the earlier moment of recovery was staged as a response to the



compositional design of the first flashback shot of the actress's bedroom in Nevers, the cellar window in the shot involving the marble no longer operates as a screen as it did in the earlier sequences – no longer screening in the actress and screening out the world. However, she goes on to state, “One holiday evening, they let me out,” and as she describes watching people cross a bridge at “the banks of the Loire at dawn,” the film offers us a shallow-focus long shot, where she is perched on her bike in the foreground as she watches the distant, blurry figures walking across the bridge in the background: “From afar they are nobody.” Here, freed from the grips of her anxiety and returned to the world beyond her bedroom and cellar, she nonetheless remains a detached observer. Moreover, the audio in these flashback shots maintain the background sounds of the Hiroshima café of the present; her reconnection with the world is still marked by a phenomenological inaccessibility.

Eventually, she leaves her hometown for Paris, and shortly after her arrival, “Hiroshima is in all the papers.” Perhaps it is nowhere more conspicuous in the film where the actress's understated mention of Hiroshima as an aside to the Nevers story reminds us of the ethical problems that emerge from the politics of cultural instrumentalization. In contrast to Cathy Caruth's interpretation that through *Hiroshima mon amour*, “a new mode of seeing and of listening – a seeing and a listening *from the site of trauma* – is opened up to us as spectators of the film, and offered as the very possibility, in a catastrophic era, of a link between cultures,” Stef Craps insists that “Hiroshima is reduced to a stage on which the drama of a European woman's struggle to come to terms with her personal trauma can be played out.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Rey Chow's insightful treatment of the film, which places more of an emphasis on the intersectional politics of high modernism in Duras's text, forges a link between the film's

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<sup>36</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 56; and Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, p. 18.

“distribution of narrative investments” and the “avant-garde moralism” that motivates its desire for “*elevating the significance of Hiroshima above the mere documentary level*” in order to claim that “cultural difference – ‘Japan’ – is there simply in order for the subjectivity – the existential survival, the attainment of individual being – of the French woman to be performed.” For this reason, Chow concludes that Duras’s “sophisticated textualist politics does not necessarily preclude cultural imperialism.”<sup>37</sup>

While I have no intention of dismissing these objections – as an ethically complex work such as *Hiroshima mon amour* demands being subjected to critical questions that extend beyond the terms of its own self-interrogation – the aim of this chapter has been to suggest that the film is primarily organized around the problems posed by the modal possibilities and limitations of acknowledging the total negativity of finitude. First, on the one hand, while the power dynamics that run through the conversations between the actress and the architect engender a cultural imbalance that opens the film up to criticisms of reducing Hiroshima “to a stage,” the film at its very outset makes it clear that the ontological leveling that characterizes the radical reduction associated with the Epicenter of the city’s traumatic history exceeds and evades the representational constraints of any kind of staging. That is, although the film is not immune to critiques of reductionism, it is precisely reductionism in its most totalizing manifestations that *Hiroshima mon amour* takes up as its central concern. However, what the film does seek to stage, following a pattern most jarringly reiterated in the prologue’s juxtaposition of disturbing archival footage of suffering and destruction with the poetic flight taken by the actress’s voiceover narration, is the resulting tension between the unrepresentability of the radical negation of the Epicenter and the wide range of aesthetic, scientific, institutional, and personal

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<sup>37</sup> Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 174, 171, 177, and 179; emphasis in original.

attempts at mapping some meaning onto the event through different modes of enunciating the horror. More importantly, it stages the points of contact between multiple empty centers – the Epicenter, the cinematic apparatus, and the individual – the intersections of which are given shape through self-acknowledgement. The impossibility of representing the radical negativity of the Epicenter not only prompts the film’s prologue to acknowledge cinema’s own radical negativity through its aesthetic appropriation and arrangement of the Nichiei footage, but it also motivates the fictional story’s configuration of self-acknowledgement as it relates to personal history, which in this case is offered through the actress’s account of an existential breakdown that affectively reveals the groundlessness of her own existence. To modify Caruth’s insight, we might say that the film is not so much concerned with furnishing a new mode of phenomenal access into the site of trauma but, rather, is working through and acknowledging the limits or failures of seeing and listening – affectively manifest in anxiety and indifference – built into any mode of addressing the world’s withdrawal into and from the site of trauma.

Additionally, while there may be truth to the insight that Duras’s dialogue and script notes are underwritten by an avant-garde aspiration for “elevating the significance of Hiroshima above the mere documentary level,” the previous section’s analysis of the prologue and its strategic positioning of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* suggests that the film’s formal and narrative composition actually reverses the trajectory indicated by this intuition. If the prologue explicitly complicates claims of insight into the “significance of Hiroshima” with its citation of the Nichiei film by gesturing toward the empty center of the blast’s zero point that completely undermines signification itself – and if we also appeal to Nornes’s claim that while the Nichiei film “never achieves perfect representation of the point of view of the Epicenter,” it nonetheless comes closer than most of cinema in its attempt to

enunciate that point of view and to embody “the absolute indifference of the camera”<sup>38</sup> – then what exactly is there for the film to elevate? Instead, by way of the film’s shift toward a fictional story that places emphasis on the dissolution of self and narrative, *Hiroshima mon amour* ultimately seeks to mobilize its own reduction as much as possible down to the level of radical negativity achieved by the Nichiei crew’s mere documentary.

Second, this section has argued that the narrative construction of the film’s fictional story stages not the performance of the actress’s “existential survival” but, rather, of her existential breakdown. Disclosed through this breakdown is the nothing, an ontological and unrepresentable groundlessness that, for Heidegger, is distinctively constitutive of the kind of being that humans are. Thus, what Chow refers to as the “attainment of individual being” – which, along with the dissolution of the self that is generated by anxiety, can take a variety of different forms that are both opened up and constrained by specific historical and cultural conditions – is only a contingent possibility that is predicated on the immutability of this existential groundlessness. In the case of *Hiroshima mon amour*, the stories never develop toward some endgame in which the actress’s “individual being” is attained in any unproblematically secure or satisfying manner. Instead, by way of the film’s distribution of narrative divestments, the actress’s personal story is privileged insofar as it centers on the emptying out of her individual being. It has been discussed above that, in addition to the fact that the first flashback shot that ruptures the continuity of the contemporary diegetic world happens to be drawn from the moment that the actress later characterizes in terms of profound depersonalization, her reemergence from the deep anxiety that is associated with the cellar and the bedroom of Nevers is presented as neither heroic nor permanent but, rather, as marked by

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<sup>38</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, p. 214.

tenuousness and violence. Indeed, in a film where the two protagonists are largely identified with and afforded a certain sociopolitical significance by their professions, her decision to eventually take up a career in performance after arriving in Paris reinforces that tenuousness, and the final act of naming each other at the end of the film, wherein the architect calls her “Nevers” and the actress calls him “Hiroshima,” gestures at the violence of reducing someone linguistically to the place of their trauma, of invoking the inarticulable and unrepresentable in order to impose or embrace a fraught sense of stability. In these ways, the film refuses to relegate existential dispossession as a means for achieving some greater sense of repossession; rather, the dramatic structure of the fictional narrative operates as a continuation of the project established in the prologue to acknowledge the epistemic and existential finitude of the Epicenter’s radical negativity by way of a self-acknowledgement of the epistemic and existential finitude intrinsic to cinema and individual being.

#### IV. Conclusion

Already in its opening sequences, *Hiroshima mon amour* calls attention to its inherent limitations by acknowledging its own finitude through making explicit the constraints, distortions, and ethical problems built into its approach to historical trauma. By doing so, Resnais’s film situates itself within, while also advancing, the concerns explored in his earlier documentary projects not only by revisiting historically and culturally specific events in order to work through the possibility of an ethical aesthetics of enunciating traumatic memory but also by demonstrating that such an aesthetics must acknowledge the double bind resulting from its own contribution to the appropriation and instrumentalization it seeks to resist. In this light, the French actress’s perspective can be understood as being focally privileged insofar as it maintains

this tension as a diegetic avatar for the film's self-critique of cinematic representation and epistemic access. As the film unfolds, it pivots its compositional emphasis from the tropes of reflexivity that were experimented on in Resnais's earlier documentaries to the tropes of narrative fiction as a way to explore the profound existential stakes of acknowledging finitude, and by way of key insights drawn from Cavell and Heidegger, it has been the aim of this chapter to argue that the film's mode of addressing the radical negativity of a traumatic event is distinguished by its attempt at attending to a demand for acknowledging one's own radical negativity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESNAIS'S CINEMATIC REDUCTION

#### I. Introduction

In a film that is otherwise marked by a sparing use of the kind of mobile frames that were stylistically prominent in Resnais's earlier works, there's a moment toward the end of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968) that features its most sustained and dynamic use of a tracking shot. It is the moment in which Claude Ridder (Claude Rich) attempts to take his own life by shooting himself in the heart. Staged in a single shot and take, this scene is unsettling for a number of reasons. That its narrative content involves the central protagonist's suicide attempt and that the steady frame maintains its centered track on his motions rather than cutting or turning away are disturbing enough, but adding further complication is an ongoing and unresolved ambiguity rooted in the film's overall perceptual composition. Whose perspective is the film's frame expressing?

Ridder's survival from this incident becomes the ostensible reason why he is eventually chosen by a group of scientists to be their first human test subject for a time traveling experiment. Indeed, when we witness the suicide attempt for the first and only time in the film, its chronological displacement is narratively configured not as a subjective flashback but, rather, as a moment of return. Ridder has been sent back through time to this crucial event. But a jarring peculiarity, which is left unaddressed by much of the scholarship on the film, concerns the body. We know that Ridder's temporal journey entails some kind of corporeal passage, because corresponding to his emergence into and from time travel, his physical body disappears and reappears in the giant bulbous time machine that sits in the scientist's laboratory. However,

unlike the protagonists of most time travel stories – which would include canonical works such as H.G. Wells’s famous 1895 novel and Chris Marker’s short film *La Jetée* (1962) to more contemporary and globally popular Hollywood franchises like the *Back to the Future* and *Terminator* series – it is not his body in its present state that is preserved as he is transported through time. That is, there is no doubling that would result from the Ridder of the present encountering his former iterations. Nor does he replace them as if he has somehow acquired the ability to re-embody a former self, for the Ridder of the past is not equipped with the added awareness and insights that would be carried by the Ridder of the present. Both of these narrative tropes confer a conventional level of agency that is entirely stripped away from Resnais’s protagonist.

But then what exactly becomes of Ridder’s body when it vanishes from the time machine, and in conjunction, how is he experiencing the past? As will be demonstrated in what follows, the vehicular body that transports the protagonist in his time travels – and through which not only the film’s viewer but also Ridder himself experiences the past – is that of the cinematic frame, and it is in terms of this formal mechanism that *Je t’aime* can be seen as continuing the reflexive interrogation of film, history, and agency that constitutes the ethical project that undergirds Resnais’s postwar cinema. However, before further delving into how *Je t’aime* can be situated within the aesthetic and philosophical formations that the previous chapters have mapped out, the following section will first draw out the broader stakes of the film’s intervention on discussions about cinema and agency by way of the problems it poses for theories of spectatorship.



## II. Resnais's Passive Frame

Claude Ridder is a thoroughly passive character. To be sure, this is a prominent element in much of postwar European cinema, and Ridder's general disposition and his configuration within the narrative remain consistent with David Bordwell's description of the "art-film character," who "slides passively from one situation to another," and András Kovács's observation that modernist films often narratively couple contingency with the inaction of their characters.<sup>1</sup> We initially see Ridder asleep in a hospital bed, recovering from his recent suicide attempt, and information about him first emerges through the conversations held between his doctor and a scientist who seek to recruit him for the secret experiment. Thus, Ridder is introduced solely as a subject of medical examination and scientific study, and the two shots that include him in the first few scenes of the film are framed around the vantage points of the professionals' institutional perspectives. When he is eventually released from the hospital, each opportunity to gain greater insight into what his motivations and desires might be are perpetually eclipsed by his apathy. A nurse chases after him and hands him his bag, "You forgot your things." He accepts it with disinterest and thanks her, "I won't need them." When he approaches a cab outside the hospital, two men affiliated with a research center that Ridder doesn't recognize offer him a ride, and his only question before agreeing to go along with them is, "How's the weather?" As Ridder is being shuttled from one institution to the next, the two men attempt at casual conversation with him by asking him various questions that would normally result in points of entry for character identification. But here, too, Ridder's responses frustrate such expectations and are affectless. One of the men asks him how it feels to be alive, and he responds, "It doesn't."

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<sup>1</sup> David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," *Film Criticism* 4.1 (Fall 1979): p. 58; András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism*, pp. 70-77.

When the time traveling experiment goes inexplicably awry, what was initially supposed to be a one-minute trip to exactly one year in Ridder's past eventually turns into a haphazard and non-chronological traversal that spans the previous eight years of his life and includes a wide range of discontinuous moments of events and dreams that bear varying degrees of duration, randomness, and repetition. If the film's opening positions him as passively sliding from one situation or institution to another, from rehabilitation to experimentation, Ridder's travels through time reveal that his life before his hospitalization was no less marked by contingency and inertia. In one such fragment, Ridder sits bored at his cluttered desk in a publishing firm ruminating along the lines of, "It's three o'clock. Three hours to go. Three minutes ago it was three o'clock. In three weeks it'll be three o'clock. In a century too. Time passes for other people, but not for me, alone in this room. For me time is static. It's three o'clock forever." Even his relationship to time – true not only of the present Ridder, who remains at the mercy of a dysfunctional mechanism that indiscriminately flings him back and forth temporally, but also of his former self as he acknowledges his own inability to pass the time – is characterized as passive. Additionally, of the two most formative traumas that he's faced in this period, the first involves his lover Catrine (Olga Georges-Picot), whose death by asphyxiation Ridder blames on his own inaction: his failure to do anything about a gas leak he may or may not have been fully aware of. Closely linked is the second traumatic experience of the aforementioned suicide attempt, during which an expressionless Ridder goes through the motions with disturbing indifference. Here, his survival has been ensured by a failure to implement his objective.

Furthermore, Ridder's passivity offers a unique staging of Deleuze's claim that neorealist cinema renders the character into a "kind of viewer" who is placed into situations where seeing

and hearing are “no longer subject to the rules of a response or an action.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Ridder is not only powerless over where or when he ends up in the trajectory of his temporal displacements, but he is also unable to intervene on the events that he revisits. And while this effectively instantiates Deleuze’s distinction between the movement-image’s cinema of the agent and the time-image’s cinema of the seer, the significance of this passivity to Resnais’s ongoing commitment to interrogating the cinematic medium are better elucidated in his film’s literalization of Deleuze’s metaphoric appeal to cinematic processes when he notes that the character of neorealism “records rather than reacts.”<sup>3</sup> Ridder’s profound lack of agency in his travels through time is bound up with the cinematic form. The clearest indication of how cinema plays this role can be located in the puzzling way in which the film frames Ridder’s only return to a moment in his past that the viewer has already encountered as part of the narrative’s present. During one of Ridder’s tours of the scientific facility, shortly after he is first introduced to the time machine, we briefly see him holding a conversation with two scientists as they casually walk through the courtyard. Here, he asks why he was chosen for the experiment, and the perfunctory answer is that a computer picked him. In the first iteration of this moment, which is set in the narrative’s present, it is placed roughly sixteen minutes into the film, unfolds in a single take that lasts ten seconds, and is framed by way of a stationary long shot wherein the characters remain in the background, occasionally obscured by the neatly trimmed shrubs that line the walkway. About fifty minutes later in the film, we return to this conversation as part of Ridder’s time travels, and while it also unfolds in a single take and starts at the same point in the exchange where he asks why he was chosen, the film doesn’t cut away for an extra five seconds,

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, pp. 126, 3.

during which Ridder says of the man they pass by along the walkway – identified by one of the scientists as the facility’s oldest employee – “He’s the computer.” More importantly, this second iteration is now framed by way of a mobile medium shot that tracks backwards while keeping Ridder in the center of the frame.

Why is there this compositional difference in the two iterations of the same moment? The narrative context for the second iteration is that of a return, namely, that of Ridder’s return to this conversation in his recent past. For this reason, the distinctive framing that distinguishes the second iteration from the first must in some way be expressive of – or conditioned by – this very return, but this then brings us back to the questions I posed in the introduction above: where is Ridder, and how exactly is he experiencing his past? We know that Ridder is being materially transported during the experiment. His body disappears from the time machine during the experiment, and when he occasionally reappears in the present to find himself unable to get out of the machine before being sent back to the past, his verbal assessments of his current situation confirm that he carries with him memories of his journey. Yet, even the very outset of Ridder’s time travel makes it clear that there is neither duplication nor substitution. If the Ridder of the present was being physically preserved, then it would result in a body doubling, which never occurs. If it were the case of re-embodiment so that Ridder’s present consciousness replaced his former consciousness, then the Ridder we see in the sequences of his past would possess some awareness of his own temporal dislocations, which never seems to be the case. Pushing further on the possibility of mental transportation, there is also nothing in the film to suggest that the Ridder of the present is reliving the past as his former self as if he is some sort of “ghost in the machine” that is trapped inside his former body and, thus, unable to bridge the gap between the

two tenses of consciousness. What option does that leave for adequately describing the phenomenological character of Ridder's time travel?

My contention is that it is precisely the difference in the framing modalities of the moment in question – once arranged as part of the narrative's present and then later rearranged as part of the protagonist's time travel – that is constitutive of Ridder's experience of the return. When Ridder's body disappears from the time machine, the emergence in the past of his embodied consciousness is folded into the aesthetic construction of the film's frame. The frame of the past is thereby thickened with a phenomenological density lacking in the frame of the present; it remains not only non-diegetic in the absence of any mutual recognition between itself and the diegesis of the past, but it is also diegetic in that it carries the time-traveling Ridder's embodied perspective. It is in this way that the film literalizes, along with Deleuze's metaphoric claim regarding how neorealism's characters move through their postwar world, Ridder's passing joke that analogically associates the facility's oldest employee with a machine, the punchline of which is suggestively withheld until the very moment that most explicitly gestures at a thorough integration of experience with film form. Thus, by being phenomenologically bound up to the cinematic apparatus, Ridder's passivity is interwoven into the film's compositional matrix. That is, his inability to intervene on the past is entailed by the very mechanism that affords him perceptual access.

While staging Ridder's experience of the past as being both predicated on and constrained by the film's frame already implicates the viewer by folding cinematic spectatorship into its broader configurations of passivity, the film illustrates this rather unambiguously through the implementational procedures of the time machine. Part of the experiment's preparatory process involves the administration of a large dose of a drug that will put Ridder into a state of

deep sleep. The explanation for the drug's purpose is uttered in consecutive fragments by three of the scientists, "We need a passive subject, who must be able...to remember...who is semi-conscious." As the drug slowly takes effect, Ridder enters the interior of the time machine and is settled into a fleshly mass that cradles the contours of his body. Sedated and placed on what looks like a plush recliner, which will eventually swallow his body up to his neck, Ridder's conditioning for the experiment invokes not only the viewing positions of moviegoers but also the long history of critical discourses – ranging from early popular writings on film and scientific studies of cinematic perception to more contemporary theories of spectatorship – that attend in various ways to the passivity of the film viewer. In most cases, the phenomenon is construed as a problem, whether social, ethical, political, or philosophical, and various strategies have been developed over time and across various disciplinary fields to overcome it. In what follows, I will offer a brief survey of the literature on cinematic passivity with the aim of demonstrating how the assumptions shared by these different approaches preclude adequately accounting for the distinctive form that passivity takes in *Je t'aime*.

### III. Cinema's Passive Spectator

In his recent book *The Shape of Spectatorship*, Scott Curtis offers an illuminating historical account of how the advent of cinema and its early use and development in scientific communities led to a discursive distinction between spectatorship and observation, the former of which was cast as a "passive, weak-willed self-abandonment to the flow of images" attributed to the average layperson's movie-going experiences and the latter of which was especially reserved for the viewing practices of scientists and medical professionals whose appropriation of moving

images was structured around the conventions of experimental method.<sup>4</sup> Curtis traces the emergence of this experimental method in its cinematic applications to the formative research of figures like Jules Janssen, Eadweard Muybridge, and Étienne-Jules Marey that constitute the period of technological transition between photography and the moving images, but he makes a particularly significant appeal to Austrian cardiologist Ludwig Braun, who delivered a presentation in 1897 to the Society of German Natural Scientists and Physicians on the benefits of moving images to his research, in order to draw out key discursive features of cinema's role in and as scientific practice. These features include the photographic image's repeatability, series photography's capacity for both sequential and simultaneous presentation that enabled synthetic analyses of causation and correlation, and the manipulability of projection speed so as to lengthen the duration of the medical gaze, all of which served to situate mediated perceptual activity within the "extensive linguistic and logical apparatus" of the medical sciences.<sup>5</sup> It is this formulation of observation as a "disciplinary method of ordering thought" that became an important benchmark during the fin de siècle for establishing proper viewing practices over and against the more superficial consumption of mass entertainment, which was deemed a public health threat by physicians, educators, and non-specialist journalists alike who worried that cinema's overburdening of attention led to the diminishment of reason and will, thereby resulting in the kind of self-abandonment that was commonly associated with hypnotism.<sup>6</sup> Whether the proposed alternative was staked on the distinctions of disciplinary method or a Schopenhauerian aesthetics of contemplation, the shared commitment to counteract the detrimental passivity

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<sup>4</sup> Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship*, pp. 111-122.

<sup>6</sup> Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship*, pp. 123, 133, 135-137; for Curtis's account of how this critical discourse of self-abandonment is couched in trends of gendering certain modes of spectatorship, see especially pp. 136-137.

associated with the habits of early moviegoers was underwritten by an aim to privilege various strategies for the proper training of the cognitive and perceptual faculties.

The intuition that moving images engender passivity was, of course, not the only or even the most influential perspective on cinema during the time of its emergence and rising popularity. To be sure, there were efforts in the United States in the first two decades of the twentieth century to incorporate films in the classroom as supplements to the traditional curriculum by taking advantage of the interest that students already had with the new medium in order to provide educational content, and British patent specialist Henry Hopwood's claim in 1899 that deploys transcendental language to correlate cinema's perceptual capacity to a "universal perception extending through the infinity" anticipates Dziga Vertov's account in the early 1920s of the superhuman revolutionary possibilities afforded by the "kino-eye."<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the critical aversion to passive spectatorship remained prevalent. If we stay with the discourse surrounding cinema's role in the pedagogical practices in the United States, the enthusiastic support for incorporating educational films articulated by Thomas Edison in his 1913 claim that, "When we get the moving-pictures in the school, the child will be so interested that he will hurry to get there before the bell rings" is counter-balanced that same year by educational researcher Leonard P. Ayres when he noted that the "new educational motion pictures are a most convenient ladle for the pouring-in of information," thereby rendering students "passive and inert."<sup>8</sup> Sharing in this sentiment, also voiced in 1913, is John Dewey's

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<sup>7</sup> Charles B. Brewer, "The Widening Field of the Moving-Picture: Its Commercial, Educational, and Artistic Value," *The Century Magazine* 86.1 (May 1913): p. 72; Henry V. Hopwood, *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-Production, and Practical Working* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 234; Patrick Brantlinger, "Mass Media and Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Europe" *Fin de Siècle and its Legacy*, edited by Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 102; Dziga Vertov, "Kinoks: A Revolution," *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, edited by Annette Michelson, translated by Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Charles B. Brewer, "The Widening Field of the Moving-Picture," p. 72; *The Literary Digest*, "Edison's Revolutionary Education," 47 (October 4, 1913): p. 576.



concern that the “widespread adoption of motion pictures in schools might have a tendency to retard the introduction of occupations in which children themselves actually do things.”<sup>9</sup> And to draw on one more example from the very same year, French cultural critic Louis Haugmard in an article entitled “The ‘Aesthetic’ of the Cinematograph,” equates the masses with “grown-up children” and claims that, at the movies, where “any mental work is already prepared in advance in order to minimize the active effort of the spectator,” they will “learn not to think anymore...they will know only how to open their large and empty eyes, just to look, look, look...”<sup>10</sup>

A broader antagonism toward passivity in general runs even deeper. For instance, while Hugo Münsterberg’s argument in his 1916 book *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* that cinema “far transcends the power of any theater stage” rests on film’s unique ability to elicit and materially demonstrate the inextricably coupled operations of voluntary and involuntary mental functions, he nonetheless names aesthetic cultivation as the photoplay’s highest calling: “People still have to learn the great difference between true enjoyment and fleeting pleasure, between real beauty and the mere tickling of the senses.”<sup>11</sup> In returning to Vertov, his utopian proclamations in the early 1920s of the kino-eye – its technological capacities making “us ashamed of man’s inability to control himself” – are couched in terms of a revolutionary project that seeks to transform “theater audiences,” whom he likens to mules that shoulder the “burden of emotional

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<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, “Cut-and-Try School Methods,” *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), p. 107, cited in Amanda R. Keeler, “John Collier, Thomas Edison, and the Educational Promotion of Moving Pictures,” *Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema*, edited by Marta Braun, Charlie Keil, Rob King, Paul Moore, and Louis Pelletier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Haugmard, “The ‘Aesthetic’ of the Cinematograph,” *French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume 1: 1907-1929*, edited by Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 80, 85.

<sup>11</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film*, edited by Allan Langdale (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 80, 87, 158.

experiences” generated by conventional fare, into agents of critical production.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Walter Benjamin’s influential championing of cinema in the 1930s with his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,” the account of distraction as an politically subversive mode of reception is pitted directly against the aesthetics of contemplation and its predication on an auratic mode of perceptual engagement, which he defines as “the unique apparition of a distance” that is embedded in the traditional bourgeois ritualism surrounding aesthetic authenticity so instrumental to fascism’s “aestheticizing of politics.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, the auratic, for Benjamin, “entails a passivity in which something ‘takes possession of us’ rather than vice versa,” and it is precisely the passivity of auratic reception that is incompatible with ideological resistance.<sup>14</sup> In the 1950s, André Bazin distinguishes how depth-of-field shots and what he refers to as “analytical montage” differently affect “the relationships of the minds of the spectators to the image” by claiming that “depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality,” thereby generating a productive ambiguity that results in “both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress.” On the other hand, analytical montage rules out this kind of ambiguity and only calls for the spectator “to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should

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<sup>12</sup> Dziga Vertov, “WE: Variant of a Manifesto,” *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, edited by Annette Michelson, translated by Kevin O’Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 7; Dziga Vertov, “Kinoks: A Revolution,” p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,” *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 21-24, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 109; Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 447.

see.”<sup>15</sup> In defending the cinema (or a certain sort of cinema), these approaches differentially level the charge of passivity against other practices or aesthetic phenomena.

Thus, in cinema’s long discursive history, the staging of passivity as a problematic has been a crucial strategy by way of which a wide range of moral, political, and aesthetic cases have been mounted. The influence of this trope on contemporary film scholarship is perhaps nowhere more clearly and urgently manifest than in the theories of spectatorship that flourished in the 1970s and shared a common conceptual canon, which included Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, semiotics, and the critical writings associated with the Frankfurt School. At times, this body of work is collectively referred to as “apparatus theory,” alluding to Jean-Louis Baudry’s major contribution to the ideological critique of cinema during the decisive transformations in French film criticism following the political events of May 1968; “*Screen theory*” in reference to a pioneering set of articles published in the eponymous British journal in the early 1970s; or more broadly “political modernism,” which, following Sylvia Harvey, David Rodowick defines as “the expression of a desire to combine semiotic and ideological analysis with the development of an avant-garde aesthetic practice dedicated to the production of radical social effects.”<sup>16</sup> What binds these writings is a shared commitment to elucidating the dominant cinema’s formation of ideologically passive subject positions through an often concealed exploitation of various technological, aesthetic, and narrative mechanisms, chief among which is identification.

For instance, in his essay “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” first published in a 1970 issue of *Cinéthique*, Baudry makes significant appeals to Lacan’s

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<sup>15</sup> André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” *What is Cinema? Volume I*, edited and translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 35-36.

<sup>16</sup> David Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, pp. 1-2.

account of subjectivity and Althusser's work on ideology in order to argue that the material conditions of cinematic recording, projecting, and viewing constitute a system of imaginary substitutions wherein the hidden processes of mechanical and social production result not only in an illusion of a continuous reality but also an illusion of perceptual control for the spectator. The former stems from cinema's projection of individual frames into a continuous and unified movement that negates difference, and the latter refers to a process of "specularization" where the viewer identifies less with the represented content than with the staging of that content by, for, and through the camera in a manner that intimates the apparatus's genealogical interconnection with the historical aesthetic practice in classical perspective construction of positing an ideal perspective for a transcendental subject. In the case of cinema, this position of the transcendental subject is taken up by the film viewer who is thereby afforded a false sense of power in relation to a false unity of meaning.<sup>17</sup> It is precisely by way of these illusions that cinema displaces critical agency and operates as a function of dominant ideology: "the subject himself being unable – and for a reason – to account for his own situation, it was necessary to substitute secondary organs, grafted on to replace his own defective ones, instruments or ideological formations capable of filling his function as subject."<sup>18</sup> The possibility of political resistance then, for Baudry, rests on shaking up this "fantasmatization" through theoretical and aesthetic practices which reflexively reveal the processes of production that engineer these illusions – the "manifestation as such" of these processes will produce a "knowledge effect" in contradistinction to an "ideological effect."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," translated by Alan Williams, *Film Quarterly* 28.2 (Winter 1974-1975): pp. 41-45.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," p. 41.

Over the following years, these insights would be subjected to further expansion, reform, and critique in the burgeoning literature on the political valences of cinematic spectatorship, but one of the features of Baudry's argument that has remained a cornerstone to political modernism is the basic conceptual structure with which it first poses the viewer's passivity as a fundamental problematic in the relationship between dominant cinema and ideology, before gesturing toward the possibility of oppositional aesthetics that aim for developing a critical agency. For instance, Peter Wollen's 1972 article on Godard's "counter cinema" draws from Brecht's work on the epic theater to demonstrate how the filmmaker's use of important aesthetic strategies – such as estrangement, reflexivity, and intertextuality – work to trouble "the power of the arts...to 'capture' its audience without apparently making it think, or changing it."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in his conclusion added to the 1972 edition of *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Wollen makes a case for an aesthetic modernism that challenges the normally "passive consumer" of the text to reflexively interrogate their own subject positioning within an ideologically manufactured unity. Such an aesthetics would force the reader to "put his consciousness at risk within the text itself, so that he is forced to interrogate his own codes, his own method of interpretation...and thus to produce fissures and gaps in the space of his own consciousness (fissures and gaps which exist in reality but which are repressed by an ideology, characteristic of bourgeois society, which insists on the 'wholeness' and integrity of each individual consciousness)."<sup>21</sup> To take another formative example, in her groundbreaking article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey mobilizes psychoanalytic theory as a "political weapon" to unearth cinema's manifestations of the "unconscious of patriarchal society," specifically by demonstrating how the

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter Cinema: Vent d'est," *Movies and Methods: An Anthology, Volume 2*, edited by Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 502.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, New and Enlarged* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 162.

ideological illusions generated by dominant forms of cinema are predicated on the inextricably bound configurations of sexual difference and visual pleasure. In mapping out two distinctive pleasures of film spectatorship, namely scopophilic objectification and narcissistic identification, along a gendered axis, Mulvey orchestrates an important reform of Baudry's concept of double identification by elucidating the underlying doubling of reification whereby the represented woman serves as an erotic object both for the diegetic protagonist and the film spectator, the latter of whom is posited not just as a cinematically constructed transcendental subject but also as one that is determinedly male.<sup>22</sup> In rendering the "image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man," the conventions of dominant cinema refuse women even the illusion of agency that Baudry's spectator enjoys.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, Mulvey calls for an avant-garde film practice which not only reflexively raises critical awareness of the gendered processes that underwrite perceptual agency in cinematic spectatorship but also actively subverts film's fetishistic illusions and destroys the "satisfaction, pleasure, and privilege" afforded to its transcendental spectator.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the accounts of passivity found among the most prominent writings on film spectatorship have historically preserved a sustained pattern that not only stages a critique of passivity as a negative phenomenon, which results in a variety of ethical, political, and aesthetic problems, but also presents some corrective that advances a different set of perceptual pedagogies or aesthetic practices. Each treatment of passive spectatorship entails a corresponding proposal for a more active spectatorship, as if the case for the latter is contingent

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<sup>22</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, Fourth Edition*, edited by Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 750-753.

<sup>23</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 756; see also Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking On* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), pp. 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," pp. 757.

upon the urgency and efficacy with which the former is polemicized. However, this bipartite structure doesn't quite apply to the distinctive configuration of passivity in Resnais's *Je t'aime*. For one, we can rule out the possibility that the film might be advocating for something like the critical viewing practices favored by early medical appropriations of motion pictures, for the time-traveling experiment ultimately fails not only in terms of the scientists' inability to control the where and the when – the point in time and the duration – of Ridder's temporal displacement, in addition to their inability to obtain the kind of perceptual access into Ridder's experience of the past that would satisfy even the most basic demands that early scientific researchers placed on proper cinematic observation. Moreover, Ridder himself, who is the only human to experience time travel through a first-person perspective, is administered a drug to induce and sustain a passive state, remains powerless over the where and the when of his trips, and is unable to intervene on the temporally displaced events, the random and non-chronological structuring of which undermines the continuity and causation that was central to early researchers' integrations of film for synthetic analyses.

Furthermore, the passive conditions – discussed at length in the preceding section – whereby Ridder himself is positioned as a cinematic viewer of his own past does not give him some ideological illusion of control and, instead, forecloses any sense of agency altogether, not to mention the sort of emancipatory critical agency that much of political modernism has been staked on.<sup>25</sup> If the perspective expressed by the time-traveling Ridder's cinematographic configuration within and by the frame positions him as Baudry's transcendental subject in

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this disavowal of critical agency may very well be an important reason for the film's commercial failure, along with its subsequent absence in much of the critical literature relative to his other works, considering that its release was in late April of 1968, when escalating political tensions would eventually culminate into the student riots and labor strikes in May and June of that year, all of which, according to Sylvia Harvey, then gave rise in French film culture to political modernism.

relation to the scenes of his past, he lacks even the illusion of power that the cinematic apparatus allegedly affords. Additionally, if the film's viewer is invited to identify with either the Ridder of the present, the Ridder of the past, or some transcendental specter of Ridder's perspective, the formal fragmentation with which the film presents Ridder's temporal displacements refuses the insights into Ridder's interiority that normally establish narrative motivation. However, despite the film's compositional experimentation with its matrix of perception – what Mulvey refers to as the “three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion” – in a way that disrupts conventional modes of identification, the film refuses the kind of critical agency that political modernism is after.<sup>26</sup> Ridder remains thoroughly passive. Even after he eventually emerges from the time machine and is released from the apparatus that reduced him to a powerless gaze, he is not greeted with the gift of some newfound and liberating sense of authority or agency. Rather, he is left immobile and unresponsive, seemingly on the brink of death with his condition left uncertain. In these ways, the film renders Ridder's experiences of the world as one of sustained passivity, and he is thus closed off from enjoying the ethical development, pedagogical virtues, and the radical political agency that have been promised in so many ways by an ever more active spectatorship.

While the most recent trend, which cuts across a variety of theoretical approaches to cinematic spectatorship, maintains that the viewer is not and has never been passive, the film's explicit, multiple, and reflexive manifestations of passivity warrant serious consideration of the phenomenon.<sup>27</sup> In *Je t'aime*, passivity is not posited as a negative condition that demands

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<sup>26</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” p. 756.

<sup>27</sup> For a formative iteration of the claim, offered in 1954, that the cognitive mechanisms of experiencing visual art preclude the feasibility of passive reception, see Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). For a sampling of prominent contemporary texts in



overcoming – neither through an instrumental staging of passivity that is then superseded by a more desirable form of agency nor through a cautionary tale that moralizes it as a problem. Rather, passivity is constructed as an end in itself, or to be more precise, it bears itself out as a distinctive sense of an end. It is by way of formulating this unique relationship between passivity and finitude that the film further develops Resnais’s aesthetic project of acknowledgement.

#### IV. The Cinematic Reduction

Whereas the accounts of cinematic spectatorship surveyed above are bound by a shared commitment against passivity in that it entails any number of social, intellectual, and political depravities, Heidegger in one of the trilogy of dialogues that he wrote in 1944-1945 and was posthumously published under *Country Path Conversations* claims that “in general the will itself is what is evil.”<sup>28</sup> According to Heidegger in his later writings, the will is not simply one among

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cognitive studies on cinema that further advance this intuition, usually by way of an explicitly stated opposition to the passive spectator posited by the film theories of political modernism, see David Bordwell, “A Case for Cognitivism,” *Iris* 9 (Spring 1989): pp. 11-40; Noël Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Stephen Prince, “Psychoanalytic Film Theory and the Problem of the Missing Spectator,” *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 71-86; Carl Plantinga, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator’s Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 18-47. For influential developments in phenomenological approaches to film spectatorship that also argue for dismantling the active/passive dyad, see Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, pp. 97-128; Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, pp. 23-34. For studies on how the genres, exhibition practices, and reception conditions of early cinema undercut the myth of passive spectatorship, see Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator,” *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing*, edited by Linda Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp. 114-133; Lauren Rabinovitz, “The Coney Island Comedies: Bodies and Slapstick at the Amusement Park and the Movies,” *American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, edited by Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 171-190.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, translated by Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 134. This significantly stands in contrast with the configuration of the will in Heidegger’s political speeches during his rectorate at Freiburg: “Our will to national self-responsibility desires that each people find and preserve the greatness and truth of its destiny... The Führer has awakened this will in the entire people and has welded it into a single resolve.” Martin Heidegger, “German Men and Women!,” *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, edited by Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 48-49. For an illuminating treatment of this topic, see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 71-78.

other faculties of a subject that can be replaced or overcome but, rather, is itself a determinative mode of how beings are revealed as beings – one that “always brings the self to itself,” thereby finding “itself out beyond itself.”<sup>29</sup> Tracing the formative development of this kind of metaphysical reductionism across the history of representationalist thought from Aristotle to Nietzsche, Heidegger ultimately claims that its most complete manifestation is in modern technology:

The will to will forces the calculation and arrangement of everything for itself as the basic forms of appearance, only, however, for the unconditionally protractible guarantee of itself. The basic form of appearance in which the will to will arranges and calculates itself in the unhistorical element of the world of completed metaphysics can be stringently called “technology.”<sup>30</sup>

Building on the present study’s second chapter, where I argued that Heidegger’s critique of modern technology interrogates enframing as a challenging-forth that disavows any limitations to the scope of revealing all beings according to their orderability and manipulability, what is at critical issue with “the will to will” is that it similarly forecloses its own finitude. There appears to be no end to the kind of “insurgent objectification of all beings,” within which the “earth itself can show itself now only as the object of the attack arranged in the willing of man as absolute objectifying.”<sup>31</sup>

Similar to how his account of the danger associated with enframing advances *poiēsis* as a possibility for the saving power, Heidegger’s critique of the will also proposes an alternative way

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, translated by Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), p. 91; Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art*, translated by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979), p. 52. For an explication of will as an “ecstatic-incorporation,” see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, pp. 9-14.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, pp. 52-63; Martin Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics,” *The End of Philosophy*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), p. 93; Andrew Mitchell, “Praxis and *Gelassenheit*: The ‘Practice’ of the Limit,” *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, edited by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 323-325.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God is Dead,’” *Off the Beaten Track*, edited and translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 191.

of being attuned: releasement (*Gelassenheit*), which is not a different type of willing but, rather, a radical form of non-willing.<sup>32</sup> Whereas the essence of technology is described as a boundless mode of disclosive appropriation, this “releasement towards things” belongs together with an “openness to the mystery,” and the essential trait of this mystery is the sustained interplay between revealing and concealing – “that which shows itself and at the same time withdraws.”<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, Heidegger refers to this attunement in terms of a “letting beings be,” which remains “the fulfillment and consummation of the essence of truth” precisely because its mode of disclosing is “intrinsically at the same time a concealing” and, thereby, ensures that the “mystery (the concealing of what is concealed) as such holds sway.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, in contrast to the “permanent enduring” of presencing that characterizes enframing’s mode of revelation, the withdrawal of beings that radical non-willing restores is couched in the language of givenness.<sup>35</sup> Undercutting the will’s perpetual drive to subjective mastery and the ordering of all beings into a standing-reserve, a releasement toward things others what is otherwise exhaustively revealed as ascertainable objects: “not only do they no longer stand counter to us, they no longer stand at all... They lie, if by that is meant the restful reposing [*Ruhen*].”<sup>36</sup> Reminiscent of the passage in “The Origin of the Work of Art” wherein Heidegger claims that “the repose of the work that rests in itself thus has its essence in the intimacy of the strife” between world and earth, this repose is what holds together the tension between disclosure and concealment in an aporetic yet

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 92-93. For a reading that couches both willing and *Gelassenheit* in terms of fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*), see Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, pp. 6-23.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” *Discourse on Thinking*, translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), pp. 54-55.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill and translated by John Sallis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 146, 148.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” p. 31; Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 74.

generative unity.<sup>37</sup> As different articulations of resisting the self-affirming endless presencing of enframing, the work of *poiēsis* and the mood of releasement each entail an acknowledgement of finitude – as an epistemic and existential limit situation – and of the role it plays in the aporetic structure between revealing and concealing that, for Heidegger, is definitive of *alētheiac* truth.

It is important to note, however, that releasement as a radical non-willing is itself neither brought about by a special kind of willing nor an articulation of deep passivity. Releasement lies “outside the distinction between activity and passivity,” as it “does not belong to the domain of the will.”<sup>38</sup> To be sure, if the will to will that is characteristic of modern technology is part of the “history of the open-region,” or the epochal history that determines how beings are revealed as beings, authentic releasement remains only a gesture toward a possibility.<sup>39</sup> Yet, while “willing non-willing” intrinsically falls short of authentic releasement, it nonetheless attends to forms of finitude that enframing in general disavows, among which may perhaps even be the very limits of enframing itself.

An additional significance of this willing non-willing is articulated by Bret Davis, who has offered among the most sustained studies of releasement and has recently translated the *Country Path Conversations*. He situates this willful attempt at letting ourselves “engage in non-willing” as not only motivating Heidegger’s later writings on building, dwelling, and poeticizing but also bearing a necessary transitional role, or what he calls an “on the way character,” towards releasement.<sup>40</sup> Crucial to this transition is the trace: “a trace of willing is required to occasion the

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<sup>37</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 91-92.

<sup>40</sup> Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, pp. 202-204, 231-232.

letting-oneself-into a belonging to the open-region – a trace which, however...is completely extinguished in authentic releasement.”<sup>41</sup>

While the cinematic configuration of passivity in *Je t'aime* undoubtedly belongs to the domain of the will, the generative tension that results in “willing non-willing” in the form of a trace, which the previous chapters of this dissertation has aimed at locating in Cavell’s ontology of film, is made quite explicit in how the film folds Ridder’s perceptual experiences into its own frame. That is, what Cavell identifies as an ontological condition of cinema – that it “screens me from the world it holds” – is here made literal as the film’s frame operates as both the condition of possibility for Ridder’s perceptual experience of his past and also the condition of his inability to intervene.<sup>42</sup> While the film screens (i.e., discloses) the world of the past, it also screens out (i.e., obstructs) both the time-traveling Ridder of the present and the viewer of the film. This is reminiscent of a key moment in *Hiroshima mon amour*, discussed in the previous chapter, in which the French actress’s voiceover description of the powerlessness she felt while watching the “authentic” films of Hiroshima’s nuclear aftermath is visually paired with an archival citation of a film clip featuring the cinematic screen as a barrier to the on-screen character who watches in desperation as flames consume the burning house that his wife is trapped in, to the actress herself whose off-screen recounting of watching the film is couched in her explicit acknowledgement of being unable to do anything but weep, and to the film viewer’s own configuration within this perceptual nexus of helplessness. However, the French actress in the prologue to *Hiroshima mon amour* maintains not only the kind of cultural and historical distance that is at issue in the voiceover dialogue with her skeptical interlocutor but also some degree of epistemic and perceptual authority that she is attempting to defend in her appeals to a wide range

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, pp. 24-25.

of institutionally and cinematically curated memories. It is precisely by way of this distance and tenuous authority that the film mounts its reflexive interrogation of representation, and it remains the basis for the film's shift in emphasis from staging an acknowledgement of epistemic finitude to an acknowledgement of existential finitude through establishing a narrative subjectivity that is eventually emptied out.

In the case of *Je t'aime*, however, Ridder's relationship to the frame during his temporal displacements bears an important difference to that of the French actress in *Hiroshima mon amour*. While it is not clear whether the particular archival clip that accompanies her voiceover meditation on how realistically the films portrayed the tragic aftermath is from a film that she herself had watched at an earlier occasion or is, instead, aesthetically expressive of the kind of helplessness that was engendered by her viewing experiences, Ridder's experiences of his past remain embodied and constrained by the film's frame and, thereby, lack this kind of perspectival distance and ambiguity. As a result, the emptying out of subjective agency in *Je t'aime* is not predicated on the narrative devices – namely, flashbacks – employed in *Hiroshima mon amour*; rather, as has been previously discussed, this disavowal of agency is built into the very form of the film. Thus, the narrative's time machine and the aesthetic foreclosure of the time traveler's intervention amount to a construction of profound passivity that attends to the various limits of experience and, in doing so, attempts to think non-willingly.

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